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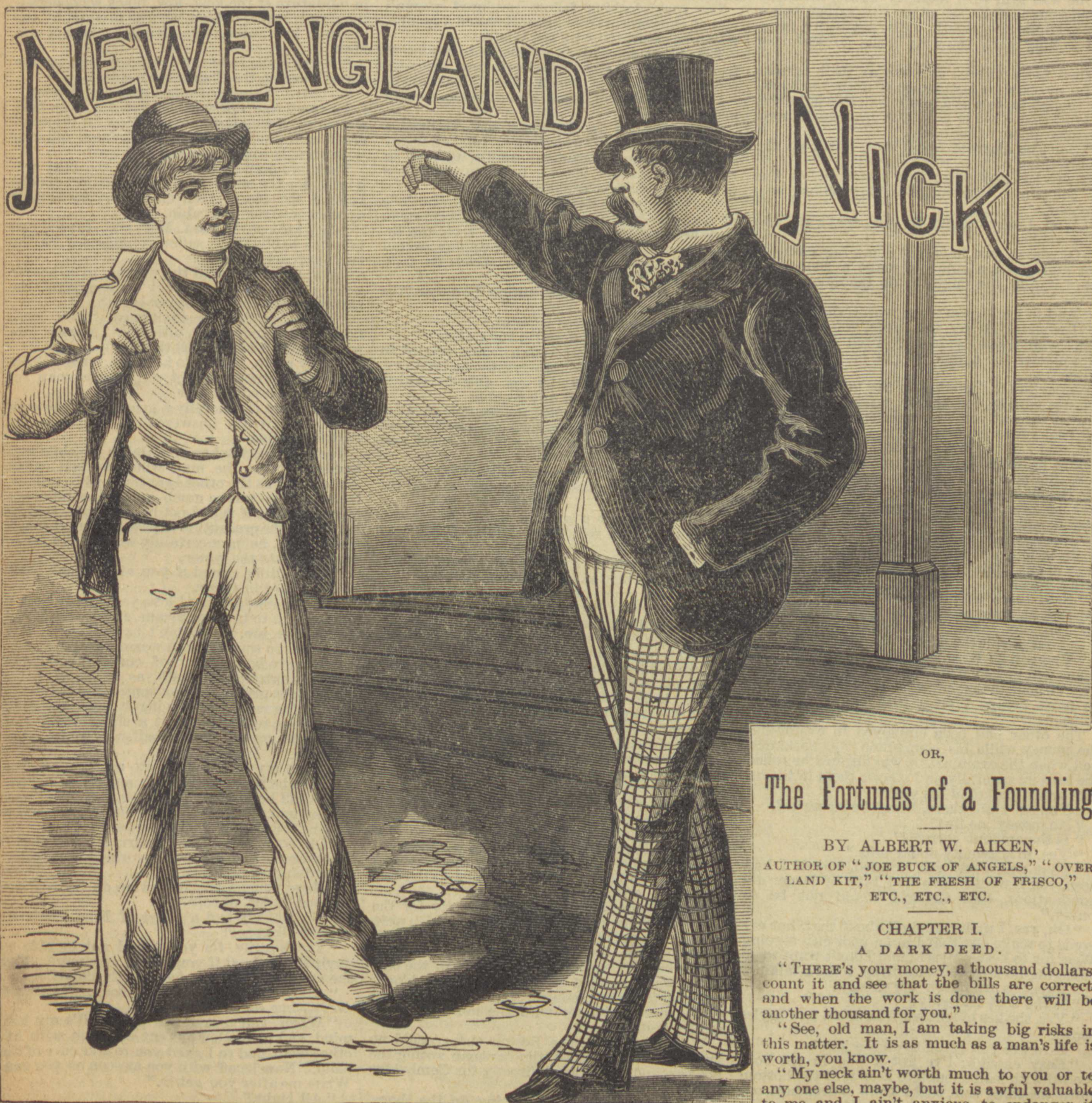
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"YOU'LL FIND NEW ENGLAND NICK IS NOT SO GREEN AS HE LOOKS!"

OR,

The Fortunes of a Foundling.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "JOE BUCK OF ANGELS," "OVER-
LAND KIT," "THE FRESH OF FRISCO,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A DARK DEED.

"THERE'S your money, a thousand dollars; count it and see that the bills are correct, and when the work is done there will be another thousand for you."

"See, old man, I am taking big risks in this matter. It is as much as a man's life is worth, you know."

"My neck ain't worth much to you or to any one else, maybe, but it is awful valuable to me, and I ain't anxious to endanger it any more than I kin help, so don't you go

for to try to play any roots on me in this matter.

"After the work is done, p'haps you will not want to fork over the rest of the mopuses."

This conversation took place between two men, passing along the Milldam, as the long causeway which is a continuation of the famous Beacon street, is called.

It is of the good city of Boston that we write, the modern Athens, that, shrined upon its many hills lords it over beautiful Massachusetts Bay.

The night was dark, the Milldam deserted, excepting that every now-and-then a farmer's wagon, on its way to market, came rumbling along.

It was near midnight, and it would seem as if the two men had selected the lonely road along which they were taking their promenade so that they might be able to converse without danger of being overheard.

The two men were widely different in their appearance, although both wore slouch hats, pulled down over their eyes, and had their overcoat collars raised close to their ears as though they feared inspection.

One was tall, with soldierly figure, evidently a gentleman, while the other was rather below the medium size, stoutly built, but with a peculiar rolling gait, the walk usual to seafaring men.

Their faces differed as much as their persons as far as could be distinguished in the darkness, for though there was a new moon, this light was so faint that it made but little impression upon the inky gloom of the night.

"Don't be alarmed about that, I will do the square thing by you, rest assured!"

It was the gentleman that spoke, and it was his companion, the rough-looking fellow, who doubted.

"Well, I only want to be sure, that's all," the other replied.

"Of course, you have got some big game on foot and you are going to make a good thing out of it, and you ought to do the square thing by me."

"And so I will, don't you worry about that."

"I wouldn't go into this thing, you know, if I didn't want money so badly. I tell you, it is no light matter for a man to put his head into a halter."

"Your life is forfeited to the law already, if you are caught, for there's an indictment for murder against you," the gentleman replied.

"That's for a blow struck in the heat of passion, and I didn't intend to kill the man, and I reckon he would have laid me out if I hadn't stopped him."

"The chances are big that I will never hang for that, even if I am caught," the other answered, sulkily.

"But this here thing that you are a-hiring me to do is murder outright, and there's no two ways about it, and if I should be caught I would swing, sure!"

"Bah! there isn't the least danger of that; but look at your money and come on for there isn't any time to lose. This cash will enable you to get out of this dangerous neighborhood."

"You can go West or cross the seas and the police will never be able to catch you."

"Without the money you are helpless and can no more escape than a bird can fly without wings."

The other had been employed in examining the money while his companion was speaking, and when the examination was finished he rolled the bills up carefully and placed them in the inside breast pocket of his vest.

"You are right there, boss," he remarked.

"No money, no fly!"

"Is the amount correct?"

"Yes, fifty twenty-dollar bills."

"That was what you wanted, but if I had been you I would have had bills of larger denominations, then the roll would not be so bulky."

"Oh, yes, I understand all about that, but my lay is to make out that I am a poor cuss a-going West for to better myself, and I don't want to go changing no large bills for to set folks a-talking."

"Twenties are plenty big enough."

"Is the boat all ready?"

"Yes, she lies off the sea-wall down by Charles street."

"How are you going to do the job?"

"Easy enough; I've got a bag in the boat loaded with lead enough to keep it at the bottom until the thing rots, and I know a deep hole out by the Cambridge shore where the bag can be put."

"Any danger of its being disturbed by fishermen or passing vessels?"

"Oh, no; none at all. Nobody ever fishes in the neighborhood, and as it's out of the channel, with shoal water all around, no vessel bigger than a sail boat is likely to come there."

"Well, you will find everything ready for you and, as it is near midnight, the quicker you do the job now the better."

"All right."

"I will be at Dutch Moll's at one, and will wait there until you come, and then will pay you the other thousand."

"You won't have to wait long for me, for I will do the work up in a jiffy."

By this time the two had quitted the Milldam and were walking up Beacon street.

When they came to a certain handsome swell-front house, they entered it, the gentleman opening the door with a latch-key.

With noiseless steps they ascended to the second story, the gentleman leading the way.

The gas in the hall was burning dimly, so that the two had light enough to see what they were about, but the leader went on like a man perfectly acquainted with the interior of the house.

"Get your chloroform ready," was the caution.

The rough-looking fellow produced a small vial of chloroform from his pocket and a sponge, which he saturated with the liquid.

This being done he, in obedience to a motion from the other, stole noiselessly into the rear room, at the door of which the two had halted.

It was a bedroom, fitted up in the most costly manner.

Upon the bed in the apartment reclined a comely young girl, who looked like an upper servant, and in a beautiful cradle, adorned in the richest manner, slept a beautiful babe, apparently about a year old.

The intruder applied the sponge to the nostrils of both the girl and the babe, and then when they were lulled into insensibility, took the infant carefully in his arms, first wrapping around it a light shawl of dusky hues which he took from his overcoat pocket.

Then, with the greatest caution, he quitted the apartment.

The gentleman waited without.

In company they descended the stairs.

At the front door, the rough fellow paused to place the babe inside of the great-coat he wore, which was so loose that he was able to fold it over the infant without any trouble.

While he was so occupied the gentleman opened the door quietly and peered out into the street as if for the purpose of seeing if the coast was clear.

"Well?" queried the rough fellow after he had drawn his coat together, completely hiding the child.

"All right; not a soul in sight. Go ahead, and remember, I will be at Dutch Moll's any time after one."

"Oh, you can bet I will do the job up brown, and then call on you for the other thousand!"

"Perform your part of the contract and you will find I will not shirk mine."

Out into the night stole the rough fellow, descended the steps and then took his way down Beacon street, went on until he came to Charles and turned into that thoroughfare.

Not a soul did he encounter, and after going a few blocks he came to where access could be had to the waters of the Charles River.

A small boat was moored to the side of the sea wall, to which he took his way.

He descended to the boat, the oars were in it, all ready for use, and in the stern was a box covered with a blanket, which had evidently been prepared for the accommodation of the child.

After the infant had been placed in the box and covered with the blanket—which was also wrapped around it so as to make it as comfortable as possible—the man took up the oars and pulled out into the gloom which masked the surface of the water.

Straight out he went, pulling directly for the Cambridge shore until all the objects which were behind him faded into obscurity.

All possible precautions had been taken to make the job a successful one, for even the oarlocks were muffled so that the ash blades working in them made no sound, and the boat glided over the water with the noiselessness of some phantom craft.

When objects on the Boston shore could no longer be distinguished, the oarsman swung the boat around and headed directly for Cambridge bridge.

"If I can't make out anything on the shore, it stands to reason that if any gentleman has taken into his head to watch me, for to see if I am living up to my agreement, I am out of his

sight now," he muttered as, aided by the strong ebb tide, he rapidly approached the bridge.

"Oh, no; no dropping this kid overboard for to be food for fishes. Oh, no, not much; I know a trick worth a dozen of that."

"Two thousand to lug the kid off, but how much to keep the kid from coming back? That's the question."

"Ten or twenty thousand, mebbe, and that will be a haul worth making."

With dexterous skill the oarsman shot the arches of the numerous bridges which lay between him and clear water, and then laid the boat up alongside of a small sloop.

CHAPTER II.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

THE sloop was a small craft, about the size of the common cat-rigged sail-boat, but differed from these pleasure crafts in being a perfectly safe and sound sea-going boat.

It was a miniature ship as far as the hull went, and though only about four tons burden, yet in the hands of competent sailors a trip across the Atlantic might be made without more than the usual amount of danger.

In fact, the craft was a perfect representation in miniature of the long, low, black schooners—the rig excepted—which were so favored by the old-time buccaneers who haunted the Spanish Main.

She was anchored near the upper end of the Navy Yard on the Charlestown side.

On board of the boat was a man and woman.

The man was a grizzled old sea-dog, who bore a striking resemblance to the fellow on the small craft, and the woman a rough-faced old hag with an ugly expression and evil eyes.

They had been on the watch for the boat evidently, for the moment that the sailor caught hold of the side of their craft, they made their appearance from the cabin.

"Lay hold of the boat. Meg, and, Abner, you take the babby!" the sailor commanded, as the two approached him.

"Ay, ay," responded the woman in a hoarse voice, and as she bent to obey the command, the new-comer got a whiff of her breath.

"Hallo! hallo!" he exclaimed, "you have been h'isting more rum, although I warned you to let the stuff alone until this job was done."

"Only a sup, Sailor, to keep me from taking cold in this ere raw, night air," the woman replied in a wheedling tone.

"Your sup is generally a good pint!" the man—who apparently answered to the name of Sailor—replied.

Then he took the box containing the child and handed it up to the man whom he had called Abner, and as the other bent forward to take it, Sailor saw he was so much under the influence of liquor, that if it had not been for the fact of his taking the precaution to pass his arm through the shrouds, he most certainly would have fallen headlong into the water.

"Well, I'll be cussed if you ain't drunk too!" he exclaimed in anger.

"No, no, Sailor; Lord love ye! I only took a single dram to keep me awake, and I was chilled to the bone, too. I couldn't have stood it if I hadn't taken something to warm me up."

"You are both a pair of cussed idiots!" the other exclaimed in wrath, as he changed his mind about giving the box containing the stolen child to the man, and placing it upon the deck of the sloop instead, gave it a shove which slid it over the smooth surface half-way to the cabin entrance.

"Don't try to lift the box up, you are too drunk to be trusted with such a precious parcel; you would be just as likely as not to lose your footing and pitch overboard with it, and then a fortune for all of us would be lost."

"Oh, come now, I ain't so drunk as all that!" the other remonstrated, endeavoring to straighten up and appear sober.

"Have you got any more rum on board?" demanded Sailor, abruptly.

"No, we only had a quart of New England, and it's all gone."

"That's lucky, for you would not be able to navigate the boat if you drank any more. Got the nursing-bottle and food for the child?"

"All correct!" piped the woman. "I've got everything, don't you fear."

"When you get down home, it's my kid, mind, and its mother has cut and run with another chap, and so I axed you to take care of the child. Now be off with you as soon as you can. Write me after you get in."

"All right."

The woman let go of the boat and took the child down into the cabin.

The man pulled up his anchor and then pro-

ceeded to get "under way;" an operation in which he was assisted by the woman, who came immediately on deck again.

There was a light breeze, blowing directly seaward, and this and the ebb tide, now half-down and running outward almost as strong as a mill-race, soon carried the little craft out of the Charles, past where the Mystic River joined the first stream, and then disappeared, as she turned the point, heading directly down the harbor.

Sailor Bill pulled in by the side of Charlestown Bridge, where the lobster floats were moored, and fastening his boat to one of the floats, ascended to the bridge.

Then he immediately took his way to the sailor region down in the old Fort Hill district, where as much squalor and crime to the square inch can be found as probably exists anywhere in the United States, and for that matter, few of the foreign cities can beat it much.

The place to which the man was bound was one of the low dens which abound in that quarter.

Drinking-shop and dance-house combined, one of the charnel-houses where the jolly Jack tars are drugged and robbed of their hard earnings when they return to the city after a long cruise.

Dutch Moll was a brawny virago who usually presided behind the bar.

She was in her accustomed position when Sailor Bill entered, and nodded to him in a friendly manner, thus showing that he was no stranger to the establishment.

The hands of the clock behind the bar pointed to the hour of one as Sailor Bill came into the den, but for all that the "festivities" were in full blast, the saloon being filled with sailors and the motley crew known as 'longshoremen, dancing and drinking. Bill had an idea that his patron was not yet on hand, but the moment he reached the bar Moll informed him that there was "a cove a-waiting to see you up-stairs in yer room."

This den was Sailor Bill's headquarters, when on shore, and he had a bedroom on the second floor.

Up-stairs he went and found the gentleman.

"This crib of yours is deuced cold and uncomfortable," the other remarked, with a shiver, as Sailor Bill entered, carefully closing the door behind him.

"Yes, the night has grown chilly. I think a storm is brewing."

"Is the job done?"

"You bet!"

"And there will be no danger of the body rising to the surface, and thus leading to a discovery?"

"Not the slightest."

"You are sure?"

"Certain as I am that I am a living man!" Sailor Bill replied, in the most positive manner.

"Do you suppose I wouldn't be careful in regard to that? I am not putting my neck in a halter with my eyes open, if I know myself."

"You would be very foolish so to do."

"Well, here is the other thousand; all in twenties, as you requested."

"Aha!" and the eyes of the ruffian glistened as he surveyed the money.

The gentleman counted the cash into Sailor Bill's hand. He had brought the exact sum.

"Much obliged," the ruffian remarked, as he stowed the money away in an inside pocket.

"And if at any time you ever want another job of this kind, don't forget to call on your humble servant to command."

"I shall not forget. But, I say, Bill, I am really chilled to the very bone, and I would like a drink to warm me up before I go out in the night air again. Can I get any decent liquor here, or is the stuff so bad that it will poison a man?"

"Oh, no. Moll keeps a private bottle for her good customers; the rotgut is for the common cattle. I will bring you up some, if you like."

"Get a bottle of good whisky. Here's a couple of dollars; that ought to be enough to buy good stuff."

"I am nervous to-night, and I need two or three drinks to brace me up." And the man shivered as he spoke.

"You are a little shaky on account of the excitement that you have gone through," the other remarked, with a grin.

"Being a new hand at the business, you haven't got the necessary stiffness in your backbone yet."

"When you have been mixed up in as many scrapes of this kind as I have, you won't mind it at all."

"Oh, no, I am cold, that's all, but get the whisky and bring a glass for yourself, that is if you care to take a drink."

"Will a duck swim?" exclaimed Sailor Bill, as he departed.

In a few minutes he returned with a bottle of whisky and two glasses.

"Shall I fill 'em?"

"Go ahead!"

Sailor Bill proceeded to serve the liquor and filled both of the small glasses—the usual whisky tumblers—to the brim.

"That is an awful horn," the gentleman remarked.

"Oh, no, the glasses ain't bigger than thimbles," Sailor Bill responded, contemptuously.

"I could drink a dozen of them, see!" and with the word he drained his glass at a single draught.

"By Jove! I couldn't do that!" the gentleman exclaimed, "it would gag me, surely."

"Oh, no," and Sailor Bill filled out another horn.

The gentleman tasted the liquor in a gingerly manner, but spit out the mouthful immediately and placed his glass upon the table with an air of disgust.

"Ah, it is like liquid fire. I can't go such stuff!"

The other laughed in contempt.

"Bosh! you don't know what good liquor is! This is the kind of stuff to warm the cockles of your heart!"

Again he drained his glass, smacking his lips over the flavor of the vile stuff with great relish.

"I must be going!" And the gentleman rose.

"Oh, try some of the whisky! I don't want to drink the whole bottle!"

But despite the assertion, he filled his glass again.

"No, no, it is too much for me."

The gentleman advanced to the door, and then turned as if to say a parting word to the ruffian.

But in this brief space of time a great change was coming over Sailor Bill.

He leaned back in his chair, with his eyes half-closed, as though the whisky he had drank was putting him to sleep.

"Hello, old fellow, what's the matter? Has the liquor gone to your head?" and the gentleman returned to his side.

Bill had become almost incapable of speaking; his eyes were glassy and his breath came thick and heavy, but with a great effort he stammered:

"Hocused—by heaven!"

And then, sinking into insensibility he would have fallen from the chair, if the gentleman had not caught him as he tumbled and carried him to the bed.

The exclamation which had escaped from the lips of the entrapped man exactly described the situation.

Too late the knowledge had come to him, for not until the limb-binding stupor had rendered him powerless did he realize that he had fallen into the trap which so often ensnares Poor Jack.

He had been "hocused." That is, the liquor had been drugged, so that any one partaking of it would soon lose all consciousness.

Sailor Bill knew the trick well enough, being an old "rounder," but in this instance he had been entrapped as easily as though he had been the greenest hand that had ever strayed into the dens "along shore."

After placing him in the bed, the gentleman proceeded to relieve him of the two thousand dollars which he had paid him for the abduction and murder of the baby.

"This has been an extremely well-planned scheme!" the gentleman exclaimed with a chuckle as he possessed himself of the money.

"A hundred to Dutch Moll for the drugged liquor and the use of her house to 'shanghae' this fellow and twenty-five more to the gang who will take him to the ship and a hundred in addition to the captain."

To "shanghae" is to get a sailor drunk and then put him on board some ship which he had no intention of joining.

When he recovers from his spree he is on blue water and has no alternative but to accept his lot.

"All goes well; the boy is dead, the mother helpless in my hands, and before this tool of mine can make his way back again to this country, I shall be in possession of the estate, and can laugh him to scorn if he should ever succeed in finding me out, which is not probable."

The trickster left the room.

At the foot of the stairs a bluff, burly fellow awaited him.

"He's up-stairs and as drunk as a fool," the

gentleman said. "When you deliver him on board ship the captain will give you twenty-five for him, for he's just the man he wants when he's sober."

And then he passed into the street, while the other summoned his gang to "press" the sailor.

When Bill Portland—that was his right name, came to his senses he found himself in a position which seemed like old times to him, berthed in the fo'castle of a ship, and from the heaving and pitching of the vessel he judged he was well out to sea.

The mate came down just then for the purpose of forming on deck those of the crew who had come aboard so much under the influence of liquor as to be unable to do service until they had slept off the effects of their potations.

Sailor Bill found that he was on board of a ship bound to Australia, and he was too old a hand not to know that that meant a long absence from the United States unless he could persuade the captain to put him on board some homeward bound ship which might be spoken during the passage.

He understood why this trick had been played upon him well enough.

His employer feared that he might attempt to blackmail him, and so had employed this method to silence him for a time at least.

"He thinks that before I can get back all evidences of the crime will be destroyed and then he can laugh at any threats of mine."

"What would he say if he knew that the kid was living?"

And Sailor Bill chuckled at the thought that, after all, he had outwitted the dark and dangerous schemer.

He was disgusted though when upon examination he discovered that his money had been taken, but consoled himself with the thought that he would make the plotter pay dearly for it in the long run.

When he got speech with the captain he endeavored to get a release, but the "old man" laughed at the notion.

"Oh, no, my fine fellow!" he exclaimed, "you have signed the articles to go to Australia, and until we get to Melbourne you must stick to your bargain."

No wonder he was obdurate when he had a prospect ahead of fingering a hundred dollars if he either delivered Sailor Bill in Australia or if the man died on the passage.

Bill Portland was too old a hand to attempt to make trouble when he found that the captain was determined that he should not leave the ship.

On the contrary, he made the best of the situation and did his duty without a murmur, and being an able-bodied seaman, got along all right.

In due time the ship arrived at its destination, Bill got his money and reshipped immediately in a "clipper" bound for New York, which sailed on the very next day after he arrived.

Ill luck attended him, though, for he was wrecked on the passage, passed through some terrible hardships, and it was nearly two years before he managed to reach the United States again.

Then his first move was to ascertain what had become of the man who had hired him to make away with the child.

But no information could he gain.

The house had been rented, furnished, for three months to the gentleman—his name was Richards, and he was supposed to be an Englishman, but where he had come from or whither he had gone no one knew.

Then, too, another strange fact, the murder of the child had apparently passed unnoticed, for no one knew anything about it.

Puzzled by these odd circumstances, Bill Portland hurried to Saco, in the State of Maine, where his brother Abner and his wife had their home.

A new surprise awaited him.

Abner Portland and his wife had disappeared. The neighbors said they had sailed in their boat about two years previous, and no one had ever seen them since.

Sailor Bill was astounded.

This would bring it to about the date when they had come to Boston, at his request, to take charge of the child.

Cautious inquiries developed the fact that no one in the neighborhood had ever heard of a baby being in Portland's care.

Then the truth flashed upon the man.

He remembered now that when he had wakened from his drugged slumber on board of the ship a violent gale was blowing, and some of his shipmates said the wind had sprung up about two o'clock, and that near morning it had blown "great guns."

The thought that his brother's craft might not weather the gale had never occurred to him.

But now the remembrance of the fact that both his brother and his wife had been drinking heavily before they started away came back to him.

"They had more rum on board, of course," he muttered, "although they swore they hadn't, and after drinking a certain quantity they were always like a couple of fools."

"The blow came up in the darkness and caught them unprepared, and so they went to Davy Jones's locker."

"The child perished, after all," Sailor Bill muttered.

"I would like to find that scoundrel, though, who hired me to do the job, and then had me shanghaed, and took advantage of my stupor to rob me of the money for which I sold myself!" And the man ground his teeth together in anger as he reflected upon how he had been tricked.

"If I could only get at him once I'd square the debt, or else my name ain't Sailor Bill."

Thoroughly baffled in his search, he gave it up.

There did not seem to be the least doubt that the abductors and the child had been swallowed by the angry waves of old ocean.

The villain who had planned to destroy the child had succeeded in his scheme, although the tool whom he hired to do the work had done his best to baffle the design.

CHAPTER III.

CAST UP BY THE SEA.

CAPE ANN, with its rocky shores and scanty soil offers poor inducements to the man who hopes to gain a living by farming, but it has been the cradle of as hardy a race of seamen as the world has ever seen, and among the Cape Ann men of the time of which we write, none bore a better reputation for skill and daring than old Moses Higgins, whose little cottage was situated at the extreme end of the cape, in the town of Rockport.

The old man had been one of the "bank" fishermen, and by hard work had acquired a little property, so that he was able to stay at home in his old age; but as he did not have income enough to support himself and the good wife—his sons had all gone out in the world for themselves—he took to boat-building, and old Moses Higgins's "dories" were reputed to be as good crafts as any builder on the "cape" produced.

It is on the morning which succeeded the night on which the abduction of the child took place that we introduced the old boat-builder to the notice of our readers.

He was always up by daybreak, and after breakfast, which speedily followed his rising, took his way to his shop on the beach.

The gale which raged through the night was just beginning to die away, and as the old man walked along the beach, he saw some "wreckage," which indicated to his experienced eyes that some craft had met with a disaster during the night.

"A small consarn, I reckon," soliloquized the old man, as he surveyed the debris.

And then a small piece of board with a name painted on it, sticking in a cleft of a rock, where the waves had flung it, caught his attention.

"Sakes alive!" he exclaimed, "that 'ere looks like a bit of a stern-board."

He was right in his surmise, and the name inscribed upon it was evidently the one which belonged to the craft which had gone to pieces on a certain ledge of rocks a short distance away.

"NICHOLAS MONDAY"

was the name painted upon the board.

"Kinder queer name for a boat," the old man observed.

"No craft by that name is owned anywhere 'round here."

Twenty paces further on, a box which had been cast up by the waves on the sand, attracted the attention of the old man.

He hastened to it and, to his surprise, discovered that within it was a child, with the tube attached to a nursing-bottle clutched firmly in its baby fingers.

The infant was sleeping soundly and, apparently, was not the least the worse for the perilous adventure through which it had evidently passed.

Old Moses searched to see if he could find anybody else, living or dead, but not a sign of human life could he discover, although he did succeed in finding a gallon jug, tightly corked,

with about a quart of Medford rum in it that the waves had disdained to swallow.

The old man shook his head.

"I reckon this 'ere jug had something to do with the wreck," he murmured.

Then, taking the child in his arms he made his way back to his cottage, where the good wife listened with amazement to his story.

"We will take care of the little one until we kin find out 'bout the wreck," the old man said.

But, in spite of his diligent inquiries, and persistent perusal of the newspapers, not the slightest intelligence could he gain.

No craft, big or little, by the name of Nicholas Monday was reported to be missing, nor could he learn that any boat by that name had ever existed.

And so the old couple determined to adopt the child which fate had in so strange a manner cast upon their hands.

Being a boy, after due deliberation the worthy pair came to the conclusion that they would call it by the same name as that of the craft which had evidently been wrecked in the neighborhood and from whence there was little doubt the babe had come.

And so Nicholas Monday the child was called.

On the rocky Cape Ann shore, in the bleak but wholesome air that pervades that locality, he grew to boyhood, a strong, hearty, manly lad.

The old couple grew to love him fully as much as though he had been of their own flesh and blood, and always treated him like a son.

Their idea in bestowing upon him the supposed name of the boat which had brought him into that neighborhood was, that some day, it might be the means of finding out his true parentage.

Old Moses Higgins was a shrewd fellow who had seen a great deal of the world, and as the boy grew up and began to develop his character, he comprehended that the foundling came of no common stock.

He was of gentle blood, and though he was brought up in the house of a plain rough man of the people, shrewd but uncultured, honest but uncouth in his ways, the lad seemed like the son of a superior race, as he clearly was.

The district school attended to his education, the old man taught him how to fish and attend to a boat, and by the time he was fifteen he was not only a far better scholar than any of his companions, but was able to take his "trick" on board a sea-going craft with any man in the district.

Another strange thing about the boy, too, was his love for horses.

He had a perfect passion for riding, and although the only "mounts" he had in the neighborhood were particularly undesirable ones, being common farm-horses, yet he succeeded in becoming a good rider, for he had a natural genius in that way.

One thing that perhaps had something to do with the development of this inclination was a visit to a circus at Gloucester, which he paid when only about eight years old.

From that time he burned to emulate the feats of the riders and tumblers, the saw-dust monarchs.

And he continued every year to get a chance to see every circus that came within twenty miles of his home.

He had a natural skill in this line, and as he grew older got so he could perform "stunts" which would not have disgraced a professional.

Then too he excelled in all manly outdoor sports.

He was a "master hand" after ducks, and always won the turkey at the Thanksgiving turkey-shoots, until at last the rest objected to enter unless young Nick was barred, for as they remarked, young Nick played Old Nick with the score.

And he was as good a shot with a pistol or a revolver as he was with a shot-gun or rifle.

And then too in another line he stood at the head.

A retired pugilist kept a little oyster-shop in the village and from him our hero learned to both box and wrestle, and displayed such natural ability in these lines that there wasn't a boy around even though many years older could stand up against him with any success.

At seventeen he became a "bank" fisherman, and at eighteen a heavy blow fell upon him.

Both his foster-parents sickened and died.

He was alone in the world.

CHAPTER IV.

IN QUEST OF FORTUNE.

THIS calamity changed the whole current of the boy's life.

The cape became distasteful to him, and he

longed, like Lord Bateman to go abroad, "strange countries for to see."

He did not in the least doubt that he should be able to make his way in the world, for he had proved himself to be such a handy lad that all through the neighborhood he was called Nimble Nick, and it was a common saying when anything difficult was to be done that if Nimble Nick could not accomplish the feat it was little use for any the rest of the boys to try it.

Nick thought too that he was cut out for something better than a fisherman's life.

The fame of the money-making West had reached the Cape Ann folks, and our hero desired to try his luck in that far off region.

Being a prudent, careful lad, he had accumulated a couple of hundred dollars so he felt quite wealthy, having heard tales of how many a young man had journeyed to the West, arriving at the goal with only a few dollars in his pocket and then had been lucky enough to make a fortune.

And if others had prospered so well, starting under such disadvantages, why should he not prosper when able to commence under far more favorable circumstances?

Within a week from the time of the death of his foster-parents our hero was on his way to the West.

He went straight to Cheyenne, and arrived in that bustling frontier town, as it was then, for we write of a time when the iron road which now spans the continent did not exist, although the building of it had been decided upon, and the preliminary operations had begun, without anything of importance occurring on the way.

It was not Nimble Nick's idea to seek for fortunes in the mining regions, for being possessed of a little capital, he thought he could do better by going into business in some one of the growing frontier towns.

Cheyenne had been recommended to him as a place which was likely to grow, and after a day's inspection of the town—he arrived early in the morning—he came to the conclusion it was about as lively a place as he had ever seen.

Being the headquarters at the time for the railroad men, the usual motley crowd which attend extensive operations of this kind on the frontier had about taken possession of the town.

It was another California over again. Saloons, dance-houses, gambling-dens and restaurants abounded.

Every other man encountered was a speculator, who had come to the town with the expectation of making a big strike.

Everybody seemed to have plenty of money, and the contrast between this bustling place—the air full of feverish excitement—and the quiet, sleepy old Cape Ann town from whence Nimble Nick had come, was striking in the extreme.

Our hero, though, was no country greenhorn, for the life he had led had sharpened his wits, and no one from his appearance could possibly have told that he had not spent all his life in a city.

Arriving in the town early in the morning he took breakfast at the first decent-looking restaurant he came to, and then proceeded to survey the place.

After an examination he concluded to take up his quarters at a medium-sized hotel, which had just been erected on the main street.

And in this hotel the first thing which greeted the eye upon entering the office was a placard that the hotel people would not be responsible for money or valuables unless they were deposited in a safe in the hotel office.

Nimble Nick did not pay any attention to this notice, for he thought that his money would be much safer in his own hands, for he had examined the room which had been assigned him and as it had a stout bolt in addition to the lock upon the door, he felt perfectly safe against intrusion after he retired to rest, and during the day he was satisfied he could take care of himself.

Our hero had determined to look about him for a week or so before he invested in anything, so he might not make a mistake.

After dinner was over, Nimble Nick took a seat in the office and picking up the local newspaper proceeded to examine it with the idea of seeing if there were any business openings advertised.

While thus engaged he was accosted by a middle-aged, well-dressed man who possessed a particularly sly and insinuating way.

"How are you?" said the stranger, taking a seat by Nimble Nick's side and laying his hand upon his knee in the most familiar way in the world.

"How are you?" responded our hero.
"It seems to me that I have met you somewhere before."

"It is very likely," Nimble Nick observed, although as far as he could remember he had never come in contact with the man before.

"Yes, in the East somewhere—New York, mebbe; you come from New York?"

"I have been in New York!"

"I knew it!" and the fellow hit Nimble Nick a whack on the knee.

"I knew I had seen you somewhere before! Hang me! I tell you I am right glad to meet you again!"

"Come and have a drink?" And as the stranger put the question he nodded toward the bar-room which adjoined the hotel office.

"No, thank you, much obliged all the same."

"You ought never to refuse a drink," the other warned, with a shake of the head, "you make a bad break out in this country when you refuse to take a drink with a gentleman when invited."

"I never drink any liquor."

"Oh, you'll get over that afore you have been out in this region long," the other asserted.

"Everybody drinks here. Have to do it, you know, or else couldn't stand the climate."

"Yes, I should imagine so from the looks of the bar-room yonder," Nimble Nick responded, dryly.

And the crowded state of the saloon seemed to imply that the residents of the town believed in spiritual refreshments.

"At home, in York, you know, I never drank anything; used to belong to a temperance society, in fact; but, out in this country, if a man don't drink when he is asked, folks are sure to regard him as being rather inclined to be unsociable."

"Queer crowd out hyer, I tell you, pard! Better come in and have something," and he patted Nimble Nick's leg gently.

"Needn't take anything strong, you know, if you are not used to it, and are afraid it will go to your head; you can compromise on a glass of ale."

But our hero was deaf to the voice of the tempter and shook his head.

"No, thank you, I do not care to take anything, not that I am at all afraid of liquor, for I have been used to it ever since I was a child, having been brought up on the sea-coast among fishermen and sailors, all of whom are in the habit of using liquor."

"I know what the taste of liquor is and am not at all afraid but what I can take my full share and carry my cargo as well as the average man, but I don't care for it."

"It is a good servant but a terrible master, and I don't intend to ever let it get a stronger hold on me than it has at present."

"Hang me, pard, if you can't reel it off jest like a preacher!" the stranger exclaimed, using a tone which he intended to express admiration, but our hero could easily detect that there was a latent sneer in it.

"Oh, that ain't much in my line. I can steer a boat or reef a sail much better."

"You have come out here to make your fortune, I suppose?"

"Well, yes, I presume that is about the way of it."

"This is the finest town in the West for a young man to make a big strike in if he has only got a little capital to start on!" the stranger exclaimed, enthusiastically, but as he spoke he fixed his keen little eyes upon the face of Nimble Nick, and our hero, who noticed the look without appearing to do so, guessed what tack the fellow was on.

He was not at all impressed with the man, for, though young in years, he was a good judge of human nature, and he had set the new-comer down as being a man of no good repute, and he imagined that at present he was engaged in a pumping operation, being anxious to find out whether he was in funds or not.

"I suppose you are pretty well fixed, eh?" the stranger continued in an insinuating manner, and he poked Nimble Nick in the ribs as he spoke in what was intended to be a playful way.

"Well, no, I can't say that I am. I am here to make money you know, not to spend it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the man, as if the other had given utterance to an extremely good joke.

"That is deuced witty, that is! Hang me, if you ain't got a fine sense of humor!"

"I shall have to cultivate your acquaintance; I shall, upon my word, particularly since we used to know each other in the East. You are a

hustler, you are! I can see that with half-an-eye."

"Let me see!" and the man pretended to reflect profoundly. "It must be nearly two years since I met you in the East."

"Yes, I think it must be fully as long ago as that, for the circumstance has entirely escaped my memory."

"Dear me, dear me; you don't tell me so?"

Nimble Nick nodded.

"Well, I don't suppose I should have remembered you, but I have a wonderful memory for faces, and after I have once met a man, I never forget him, although I ain't worth a cent on names as a general thing; but I think I remember yours, though—Monday, isn't it? Nat Monday?"

Now, this would have struck Nimble Nick as being very strange that the man knew his name, as he was satisfied he had never met the fellow before, had he not remembered that his name was on the hotel register, where he had inscribed it upon his arrival just before dinner, and that it was not at all improbable the stranger had been in the immediate neighborhood at the time.

The fact that he took his first name to be Nat seemed to show that the surmise was correct, for upon the hotel register he had simply written, N. Monday.

The man had learned the last name and then guessed at the first.

"No, my first name is Nicholas, not Nat."

"Ah, yes, yes, of course!" the man exclaimed immediately.

"I was a donkey not to remember, but, as I told you, my memory in regard to names is uncertain, but when it comes to faces I never fail."

"I guess that I am not very good at that sort of thing, for I can't recall either your face or name."

"My name is Blake, Joseph Blake, and I am from old Missouri. But, by the way, wouldn't you like to take a stroll around town?—I can show you the ropes."

Our hero thought he might as well let the stranger expose his hand, and so he consented to accompany him.

As he expected, the man took him into a half a dozen places where gambling was carried on, and took pains to explain to him how easy it was, by investing five or ten dollars, to win as many hundreds; but Nimble Nick was not greenhorn enough to be tempted to play, neither would he drink anything; and after wasting a couple of hours, the genial Mr. Blake gave up the task in disgust.

"You're too durned skeered to make any money in this town, and you had better go back East!" he remarked when Nimble Nick parted from him.

"Not so skeery as you may imagine, and you'll find New England Nick is not so green as he looks!" was our hero's rejoinder to the angry stranger.

CHAPTER V.

MORE WAYS THAN ONE TO ROB A STRANGER.

BLAKE, who was a good-sized, well-built fellow, glared at Nimble Nick for a moment, as though he had an idea of taking offense at the remark, but when he surveyed the muscular development of the young sailor, who, by reason of the life he had led, was all bone and muscle, and as spry on his feet as a cat, came, apparently, to the conclusion that if it came to a personal encounter, he might get the worst of it.

So, with a contemptuous sneer, he remarked:

"Oh, you are green enough to be skinned, and you can bet your bottom dollar you will be if you don't clear out of this town mighty quick."

Then he turned upon his heel and departed.

When Nimble Nick re-entered the hotel, the clerk beckoned to him.

"I tried to catch your eye and give you the wink, when I saw you talking to that fellow," the hotel official exclaimed.

Our hero looked a little doubtful, for he felt sure that if the clerk had tried to do anything of the kind, he most certainly would not have failed to perceive it.

"Did you?" he said.

"Yes, for I reckoned the fellow was after you. Did you lose anything?"

"No; why should I?"

"Didn't he get you to gamble?"

"No, indeed!"

"He tried, though?"

"Oh, yes; he took me around town and showed me the sights, and tried to impress upon me the fact that the easiest way in the world to make money was by way of the gambling-table."

"And you wouldn't have it?" asked the clerk, in amazement.

"No, sir."

"Well, I tell you now, you have had a lucky escape, for that fellow is the boss! Did he tell you his name was Blake?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is true enough. Joe Blake is his name, but among the sporting men he is known as the Missouri Charmer."

"He is a bad egg—no worse one in the town—awful handy with his fists—used to be a prize-fighter, I've heard—and the quickest man on the 'draw' with a pistol of any galoot in the town."

"A fine character!"

"Oh, yes; he is one of our leading citizens," replied the clerk, with fine sarcasm.

"But, I say, how is it that such men are allowed to come into the hotel?" Nimble Nick asked.

"I presume, from the little experience I have had with him, that his business is to pick up strangers whom he supposes to have money, and induce them to patronize some of the gambling-dens which seem to flourish so well here."

"We couldn't stop it, you know, even if we tried," the clerk explained.

"The man never does anything out of the way while he is on our premises; always behaves himself like a perfect gentleman, you know, and we couldn't say anything to him."

"I shouldn't have said anything to you, only I supposed he had taken his whack at you, and that I wouldn't interfere with his game to speak about the matter."

"Nice state of affairs this is," Nimble Nick remarked, in disgust.

"Oh, it's rough going here sometimes; the sporting men have the upper hand, as you can see for yourself with your own eyes."

"It would be as much as a man's life is worth to interfere with them; and I can tell you that you will have to keep your eyes open and your wits about you if the Missouri Charmer takes a grudge against you."

"It isn't often he fails to rope in his man when he goes for him, and, mebbe, he will lay it up against you. I wouldn't say anything about it, anyway."

Then the clerk was called to his duties by the arrival of some guests, and our hero was left free to meditate upon the situation.

And the conclusion he came to, was, that if he could only make money by remaining in some such pest hole as this, he would prefer to get along with less riches and live in a more congenial place.

He had paid his board at the hotel for three days though, being obliged by the rules to pay in advance, as he was without baggage, and he concluded he might as well stay the time out, and during the three days he might hear of some more desirable spot to drive his stakes.

After supper he took another walk around town and came to the conclusion that, although the town was pretty bad by day, it was ten times worse at night.

Sickened by the scenes of vice so openly displayed, he returned to his hotel and went to bed early.

Having now a clear idea that he was in a community where a few lawless ruffians were lording it over quiet, honest citizens, and that, as in the old feudal days, each man was a law unto himself, going on the Scotch outlaw's simple plan

"That he should take who had the power,
And he should keep who can,"

he took particular pains to make sure that the fastenings of his door were all right, turned the key, shot the bolt home in its socket and then undressed and went to bed, satisfied that there was little danger of any one getting into the room without making noise enough to rouse him from his slumber.

Our hero had not obeyed the caution to deposit his money in the hotel safe.

He judged that it would be the wisest course for him not to allow anybody to know that he had any amount of money, and then, as he had the most of it securely done up in a money-belt, strapped around his waist, under his shirt, right next to the flesh, he did not think it was possible for any robber to get at it.

With shrewd, Yankee-like caution, he had divided his money into three portions.

The bulk of it was in the money-belt; his wallet contained about twenty-five dollars, and, sewed up in the waistband of his pantaloons were two twenty-dollar bills.

This last sum was only to be used as a dernier resort—to carry him home East, say, if his quest was a failure and he lost all the rest of his money.

Within ten minutes after touching the bed our hero was fast asleep.

And, despite the bustle in the street, which was kept up until after midnight, the New England boy slept as soundly as a top.

By one o'clock the town was pretty quiet, and at two all the noise had ceased; everything was shut up, with the exception of some few of the gambling dens where an "all-night" game was running.

At three, there was not a soul stirring, and this was the hour that a couple of the guests of the hotel selected to make a raid upon some of their fellow-lodgers.

And the first room that they operated upon was the one occupied by the New England boy. Slight was the protection afforded by the lock and the bolt against these expert marauders.

In the first place, they turned the key in the lock from the outside by means of a pair of "nippers"; then, one of them mounted to the transom window, resting his foot on the door-knob and introduced a cane, with a looped wire attached to the end of it, into the room.

Catching the knob of the bolt in the wire it was gently drawn back.

And thus entrance was easily gained and without in the least alarming the sleeper.

The moment the two were in the room they proceeded to render their prey helpless.

This was done by means of chloroform administered with the aid of a sponge, and the operation was performed in such a skillful manner that Nimble Nick passed from the realm of dreamland into that of complete insensibility without the slightest idea of what had happened.

Having thus rendered it impossible for their victim to interfere with them, they proceeded to search for his valuables.

His wallet was emptied, also the money-belt around his waist, but the twenty-dollar bills concealed in the waistband of the pantaloons escaped their researches.

Shrewd as were these nocturnal marauders, they did not think it probable that the stranger had any more money concealed after discovering the large sum in the money-belt.

The pair retired as noiselessly as they came, and proceeded to operate upon some other victims, who had evidently been marked for prey in advance, for it was plain that the pair were working on a system and did nothing at haphazard.

The raid was a complete success with one exception.

An old fellow, who had said he was a newspaper man, and was evidently a tough old bird, had taken the precaution to tilt a chair up against his door and place the wash-basin in it on its side, so that the slightest movement of the chair would send it clattering to the floor.

When the marauders discovered this trap they did not attempt to force an entrance, satisfied that it could not be done without disturbing the inmate of the room.

About six in the morning the "music" began, when the sleepers awoke, one by one, and discovered how thoroughly they had been plundered in the night.

The landlord was deaf to all complaint.

"There was the rule and in the office the safe, and if men would not do what they ought to, he must not be blamed!" he declared.

Nimble Nick made less trouble than any of the rest, for he was a firm believer in the old adage that there wasn't much use in crying overspill milk, although at one blow nearly all his savings, wrung from the bosom of the treacherous sea at the risk of life and limb, had been swept away.

"You are taking the matter mighty quietly," the clerk observed to our hero, leaning over the counter and speaking so as not to be overheard by the rest of the sufferers, who were storming up and down the room, threatening loudly what they were going to do.

"Well, fussing about the matter will not bring back the money," Nimble Nick answered. "I feel badly enough about it, of course, and although I am not making as much noise about it as the others, yet I would be willing to bet a large sum, if I had it, that there isn't a man in the room who worked so hard and risked so much to gain his money as I did."

"Well, Monday, you are a trump!" the clerk exclaimed, clapping him on the shoulder.

"And I take an interest in you. I do, upon my word, and I would go out of my way to do you a service."

"Say, if I give you a pointer, you won't go back on me—you won't give me away?"

"Ce tainly not."

"The thing might cost me my life, you know, if a certain party heard of it and chose to take

it up, and he would be jest ugly enough to do it, too."

"You need not be alarmed. Whatever you say to me will never go any further."

"If I give you the pointer, you know, it wouldn't help you in the least to let anybody know that it came from me, and might get your humble servant to command into a peck of trouble."

"You have my word, and I stand to my word with my life."

The clerk looked the New England boy full in the eyes, and the expression therein convinced him that he could be trusted.

He cast a cautious glance around, and then brought his mouth close to the ear of Nimble Nick.

"The Missouri Charmer took a bed here last night," the clerk whispered.

Our hero nodded.

He understood what was meant.

CHAPTER VI.

INTERVIEWING THE OFFICIALS.

THE victims held a sort of a caucus in the hotel office.

There were ten of them who had suffered at the hands of the marauders, and after due deliberation they came to the conclusion that a committee ought to be sent to the chief of police, with a request that he should look into the matter.

Two men were selected to attend to this business, they departed, and the rest waited with impatience for them to return.

When they came back it was in company with the chief of police, a burly, red-faced man, with a very pompous way, Tom Breniker by name.

Nimble Nick had taken but little part in this matter, for he had no faith that the visit of the chief would amount to anything.

In fact, the friendly clerk had confidently said to him:

"A heap of good it will do to send for Tom Breniker. If folk don't lie awfully, he is hand and glove with some of the biggest rascals in the town, and, for my part, I don't think he is any too good to take his share of the plunder in such a job as this, if he thought it wouldn't come out against him."

The clerk was a prophet, for upon his arrival, after pretending to examine into the matter closely, the chief put all the witnesses through a regular cross-examination, which of course amounted to nothing, for not one of them was able to tell anything about the robbery, excepting the bare fact that when they went to sleep they had their valuables, and when they awoke they were gone, and that from the peculiar sensation which they all experienced, they believed they had been chloroformed.

The chief looked wise, shook his head and said:

"Well, gents, I'm afeard I can't do much for you. This hyer is one of the neatest jobs that has ever been done in this hyer town, and, from my experience, I feel bound to say that it must have been done by professionals who are away up at the top of the heap, and it really reflects credit on them."

Most of the witnesses made wry faces at this.

It was no consolation for them to be told that they had been robbed in a scientific manner by first-class professionals, rather than by a gang of bungling amateurs.

"I would like to hold out to you some hope of ketching the fellers, and gitting back the plunder; but, gents, as I am a living sinner, I don't think there is any more chance of that than there is to ketch a bird in the air."

At this announcement there was a general groan from the victims, and the chief shook his head knowingly.

"I am powerful sorry for you, gents, but thar ain't the least bit of use of sending you off on a false trail."

"If thar war any chance of the galoots staying in town, and any of you could identify your money—for in course it goes to reason that the fellers w'ot did the trick won't go for to flourish around the town with your watches or jewelry, you know—why, I might be able to put salt on their tails."

"But you can't hope to strike any sich luck as that, by a jugful!"

"Oh, no, gents, I might as well give it to you straight in the beginning."

"The odds are jest about a thousand to one that the galoots w'ot got this plunder, had horses waiting, and were fifty miles away before you snoozers were out of your beds this morning, and the chances are about another thousand to

one that the most of the money has been blown into some faro bank afore this time."

And this was all the consolation that the "tenderfeet" got after having been robbed in this outrageous way.

Nimble Nick had remained in the background throughout the whole of the discussion; he had a plan in his head, but he did not deem it wise to make it public, as he intended to carry it out himself and did not wish the assistance of any of his fellow-victims.

But when the chief of police returned to his office, which he did immediately after the close of his interview with the sufferers in the hotel, Nimble Nick followed him, and the chief had only time to take a chair, light his cigar and elevate his feet to the top of the table, when the New England boy entered.

The chief recognized him immediately as being one of the guests who had suffered at the hands of the marauders, and his brows knitted ominously, for he thought he had got rid of the matter, and was not inclined to be bothered by it any more.

"Chief, I want to say a few words to you about this robbery," the new-comer said as he entered.

"Well, now, young man, I have told you what I think about the matter, and I couldn't say anything new about it if I was to talk for a month."

"If you remember I didn't take any part in the conversation, although I have an idea that I may be able to do something, that is, if my theory is correct that the men who committed the robbery are still in the town."

The chief frowned; this was in direct contradiction of what he had advanced and he didn't relish it.

"Oh, mebbe you know more about the matter than I, though I reckon I am 'bout old enough to be your father, and have been roughing it around this 'ere western country ever since I was knee-high to a grasshopper!"

"I don't pretend to know anything about it," Nimble Nick answered, quietly.

"I have an idea, that is all, and I come to you to submit it."

"Oh, well, fire away!" the chief exclaimed. "You greenhorns allers think you kin make the rifle even if we old stagers don't see no show, nohow."

"You spoke about identifying the money."

"That was my say-so."

"I think I could identify some of mine."

"Oh, mebbe, mebbe," observed the chief, carelessly, as though the matter was of no consequence.

"Now then, what I want to know is this," remarked Nimble Nick in his quiet way, not at all put out by the careless indifference of the other.

"Suppose I find a man displaying money which I know to be mine, what am I to do?"

"Well, I reckon that if it war me, I should climb him, thar and then," responded the official, blowing out a great cloud of smoke.

"Not come to you to arrest the man?" the New England boy queried.

"Well, that might do if you were on the other side of the Missouri, you know, but out hyer in this region one don't do business in that way."

"In the first place, young man, you must excuse me for doubting if you could do anything of the kind."

"Mebbe you think you could identify your money, but I reckon that ain't an easy thing to do."

"I have known a heap of men die with their boots on for trying jest such fool tricks as that."

"You mustn't monkey with a buzz-saw, you know. You ain't used to this country and ought to be wise enough to take a word of advice or else you may git planted afore yer time."

"The chances are big, you see, that if you go to fooling round some fellow and a-chinning that he has your money, you'll be shot or stabbed so quick that you will never know what hurt you."

And the chief of police shook his head in a very wise manner as he finished the speech, as though his words carried the wisdom of an oracle.

"Then I am to understand that I must not expect aid from you even if I succeed in discovering a man with my money in his possession?" the New England boy asked, perfectly calm, discussing the matter in the quietest manner possible.

"That is about the size of it!"

"I must take the law into my own hands."

"Yes, but I wouldn't try it, unless the feller was smaller than you are," Breniker remarked humorously.

"All right, that is what I wanted to know," Nimble Nick observed, turning to depart.

"I say, young man, that ain't the game you are going to play, is it?"

"I guess it is."

"Then, I reckon thar's a right smart chance for a funeral and you'll get the job of riding in the first carriage."

"Well, one can't, most always, sometimes, generally tell how things will turn out in this world," was the New England boy's parting remark as he went through the doorway.

"That cuss is a plucky little talker, but I reckon he ain't got the sand to back it up," was the comment of the chief of police as he reflected upon the particulars of the interview.

Nimble Nick felt sure he could easily identify quite a number of coins which had been taken from his wallet by the nocturnal marauders, for he changed a twenty dollar bill at Omaha and, as part of the change, he had received five dollars worth of quarters rolled up in a package, and when he came to examine them he found that some genius had operated upon them in a very odd manner.

Our hero's scheme was an extremely simple one.

He proposed to have his eyes upon the "Missouri Charmer," keeping as much in the background as possible, so as not to allow the other to perceive that he was watched.

Of course he would spend money; for from the little he knew of the man he understood that he was a heavy drinker.

If he was one of the robbers the chances were great that some of the marked silver was in his possession and that he would get rid of it in the saloons.

And as the chief of police washed his hands of the affair, Nimble Nick determined if he saw any of his marked silver paid out by the ruffian to call him to an account immediately.

From the friendly hotel clerk our hero received information of value.

It was seldom that the Missouri Charmer was seen abroad until after dinner.

He was of nocturnal habits; like the beasts he sought for his game at night and slept during the day.

One particular saloon—the Chicago House—he made his headquarters, and he was usually to be found there any time after dark.

The Chicago House was one of the principal saloons of the town, being saloon, dance-house and gaming hell combined, and the hotel clerk warned Nimble Nick that nearly all connected with the place were pards of the Charmer, and that he must be on his guard if he attempted to catch the ruffian upon the hip in that particular place.

Our hero thanked the clerk for the friendly warning, and said he would be careful.

That evening, about eight o'clock, Nimble Nick sauntered into the Chicago House.

The Missouri Charmer was standing with a couple of friends in front of the bar, just about to indulge in some liquid refreshment.

He had just given the order to the bartender, and drew forth a handful of silver to pay.

Selecting three quarters from the rest he placed them upon the counter.

Nimble Nick, coming up right at his side was able to get a good view of the money. As he had anticipated, he recognized his marked coins.

Two of the three quarters had the tiny hole through the throat of the Goddess of Liberty.

And the moment he made this discovery he was quick to act.

"Aha!" Nimble Nick cried, as he possessed himself of the two quarters.

"You are the man, then, who robbed me last night!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHARMER IS ASTONISHED.

If a thunderbolt had suddenly burst through the roof and opened a gulf in the floor before the feet of the Missouri Charmer, he could not have been more astonished than he was at the bold movement of the New England boy.

For a moment he gasped in speechless rage, while every eye in the place was bent upon him, to see what action he would take, for our hero had spoken in such loud tones that the accusation he had made was heard by all within the saloon.

"What is that you say?" the Missouri Charmer cried, as soon as he recovered the use of his tongue.

"There isn't any need for you to ask that question. You know what I said well enough," Nimble Nick retorted.

"Well, I don't know about that. Maybe I am a little deaf sometimes," observed the other, slowly.

He had recovered his composure by this time, and having determined to execute a signal vengeance upon the bold youth who had dared to make so foul an accusation against him, wanted to attract the attention of every one in the room, so that all might see the punishment administered.

"I said that you were the man who robbed me of my hard-earned money last night—the thief who stole into my room at the hotel, and here is the proof!" And as he spoke the New England boy displayed the coins which he had snatched from the counter.

The face of the Missouri Charmer grew black as night at the persistent way in which his accuser repeated the charge.

"Young man, you are a stranger in these parts—a regular greenhorn—a tenderfoot of the first water, or you would know better than to go and shoot off yer mouth in this hyer way!" the Missouri Charmer cried, angrily.

"Thar's been many a man shot in this town for daring to say one-half of what you have spit out so freely, and if you wasn't sich a greenhorn I would have wiped you out right at the beginning of this hyer fuss."

"But I'm a gen'leman, I am, and I want my feller-citizens hyer to understand that thar ain't a word of truth in what you have said, and when I have made that air thing manifest to them, then I will go for you in a way you will despise."

"You hav'n't got ary bit of proof of what you say. I am no robber, and you lie when you say I am!"

The fellow was defiant, and with good reason, too, for although he was considerably astonished at the promptness with which the stranger had pitched upon him as having had a hand in the plundering of the hotel guests, yet he couldn't see how on earth the other would be able to prove that he had anything to do with the affair.

"The robbery was skillfully planned and dexterously executed, and, although I don't doubt you think you have covered up your trail so well that no one can bring home to you your guilt, yet I reckon I have evidence enough to convict you!" Nimble Nick replied, decidedly.

"These coins which you just took from your pocket and laid down upon the bar to pay for the drinks which you ordered, were taken from my wallet last night!"

The Westerner stared at Nimble Nick for a moment as though he thought he was crazy to make such a decided declaration, and then burst into a contemptuous laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha! ho, ho, ho!" he roared; "well, now, darn my cats! if this don't beat everything I have ever heard of all holler."

"Oh, this is the richest yarn I ever struck! Why, you durned fool galoot, you don't mean to say that you kin pick out the quarters of dollars that you had in your pocket from the other quarters that are floating around this town?"

"That is exactly what I say, and I can do it, too, every time!" Nimble Nick responded, promptly, much to the amazement of the other.

"You are only trying a bluff game now!"

"Nary bluff!"

"It is an impossibility, and can't be did!"

"Don't you go any wealth on that, for you will lose your ducats if you do. If you have any more quarters in your pocket, I dare you to put them out on the counter, and I will pick out the ones which were taken from me in an instant!"

This bold assertion staggered the ruffian for a moment, and he felt rather inclined to refuse to accept the challenge, although he was utterly in the dark as to how the feat could be accomplished, and doubted decidedly if it could be done.

He did have in his pocket part of the silver which had been stolen from the New England boy.

The Charmer had not taken the trouble to examine it closely, but, as far as he had noticed, there wasn't anything remarkable about the coins, nothing to distinguish them from the other silver which he carried.

Every one in the place was gazing at him with eyes full of wonder, anxious to see what he would do; and, spurred onward by this fact, not willing to be backed down by the young stranger, he dove his fist down in his pocket and brought up a handful of silver.

Picking out ten quarters from the money—all

he had—he slapped them down upon the counter and cried:

"Thar they are! Now let me see you pick out your money, if you kin!"

Nimble Nick performed the task with a celerity that astounded the Missouri Charmer—the lookers-on too, as well.

Selecting eight coins from the ten, the New England boy pushed them to one side.

"These eight are mine—the other two are not," he said.

For a moment the ruffian gazed at Nimble Nick, and then at the coins in a dazed sort of way, and all the bystanders stared as well, for it was a mystery how on earth the young stranger came to so prompt a decision, for, as far as could be seen, the quarters were all alike.

If some had been old and battered-up pieces, and others fresh and new, or if the New England boy had looked at the dates, they could have understood the process by means of which he determined which belonged to him and which did not, but, as it was, they were all in the dark.

"You durned galoot! you are jest a-guessing at this hyer thing!" the Missouri Charmer cried, feeling that it was necessary for him to say something, and yet not exactly knowing what to say.

"Thar ain't the least bit of difference in these hyer quarters, and I defy you, or any man in the room, to tell t'other from which."

"I had five-dollars' worth of quarters in my pocket an' they were all marked—every one of them!" Nimble Nick asserted.

All stared in amazement, for none of them were sharp-eyed enough to detect that there were any marks upon the coins.

The underjaw of the Missouri Charmer dropped, for if this was the truth he was in a trap; he resolved to brazen it out though, but he was sorry now that he had stopped to bandy words with his accuser instead of "going" for him in the beginning.

"Tain't no sich thing, and you can't play any sich game as that on me!" the ruffian declared, determined to carry the thing through by a resort to brute force, if he was really caught in a trap, as he had little doubt was the case.

"Oh, there isn't any mistake about it!" the New England boy replied, firmly.

"All these coins are marked ones and they were stolen from me last night!"

"It's a cursed lie!" yelled the Missouri Charmer, firmly.

"It is the truth and you know it!"

"Thar's no mark on them quarters!"

"There is; take a good look, all of you!" and as Nimble Nick spoke he held one of the coins up before the light.

"In all of my quarters there is a tiny hole through the neck of the Goddess of Liberty. Watch how the light gleams through it."

All within the room strained their necks and gazed in wonder.

And now, that their attention was directed to it, the lookers-on could plainly distinguish the odd, peculiar mark by means of which the coins could be easily identified.

"Every one of the five dollars' worth of quarters that I had in my pocket had this mark upon it, and each one of these coins bears the same," continued the New England boy.

"See!" and then, one after the other, he held the silver pieces up against the light, and allowed the crowd to see that his statement was correct.

"Now then, when I find the coins which were stolen from me in possession of a man, am I not justified in believing him to be the thief, unless he can show that he came honestly by them?"

"Don't you dare to call me a thief, or I'll smash you all to pieces!" cried the Missouri Charmer, working himself up into a sudden fit of passion, for he comprehended that he was in a trap and saw no way to disprove the charge.

"You are a thief, and you ought to be in jail!" Nimble Nick retorted, not at all dismayed by the threatening looks of the other.

"You durned little rascal! I'll lay you out for that!"

And with the words, the ruffian rushed at Nimble Nick.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUEL.

If he expected to terrify the young stranger by his bull-like rush he soon discovered how wrong was the calculation, for Nimble Nick had not been reared among the sturdy fishermen of old Cape Ann to give way before the attack of an angry bully.

And although the Missouri Charmer was a far bigger man in every way—taller, stouter, and fully twenty pounds heavier—yet an experienced “ring” veteran, used to estimating the value of men in a pugilistic light, would most certainly have declared there was no comparison between the two—a man like the Missouri Charmer had no business with a boxer of Nimble Nick’s build and abilities.

And that such a judgment was correct was speedily made manifest, for as the Missouri Charmer rushed at the New England boy with the idea of bearing him down with his superior weight and strength—a game which he had successfully tried many times before, but not with men of the Nimble Nick stamp—our hero received him with a savage blow which, alighting just between the eyes, immediately brought the ruffian to a stand-still, causing a countless multitude of stars to dance before his astonished eyes.

And then, “taking the measure of his man,” with as much coolness as though he was in a sparring-school, practicing with the gloves, Nimble Nick sent out his “left,” catching the other a sounding thump in the breast, just under the heart, which to the Missouri Charmer’s imagination seemed to fairly make his ribs crack.

The effect of this ponderous blow was to lay the ruffian upon his back; the Missouri Charmer sprawling upon the floor in an extremely undignified way.

Never in all his tempestuous career had he been so easily handled.

Since his advent upon the frontier, he had not always proven the victor in the rows in which he had taken a part, but when he had been compelled to lower his colors and cry enough, it had been only after a fierce struggle.

But then, never before had he faced a man who was not only stronger and more agile than himself, but he knew how to use the gifts which nature had bestowed upon him, in the most scientific way.

And, strange to relate, although the ruffian was on his favorite “stamping-ground,” and two-thirds of the bystanders were his particular friends, not one ventured to interfere, so great was the admiration which the prowess of the young stranger excited.

The Missouri Charmer, although a bully and a brute, was no fool, and it had never been said of him that, in a matter of this kind, he was a glutton who never knew when he got enough.

The taste he had received of the quality of his opponent was quite enough, and he did not hunger for more in the fisticuff line.

His defeat though, only made him more hungry for revenge.

If he could not cope with his antagonist in bodily strength and skill, then the potent aid of murderous gunpowder must be called into play.

He scrambled to his feet and reached for his revolver, but when he got his “gun” out, his disgust can easily be imagined upon making the discovery that his opponent, understanding what he was up to, had also drawn his pistol, and had him covered.

In Western parlance:

Nimble Nick had the drop on him in the worst kind of way.

“Go slow!” our hero commanded.

“If you attempt to cock that revolver, I will drill a hole right through you!”

The Missouri Charmer glared in speechless rage.

“Hallo, hallo!” he cried, “ain’t you going to give me any show at all?”

“Yes, a show to be shot, if you don’t put up that gun and behave yourself!” Nimble Nick answered, promptly.

“You have called me a thief and hammered me, and I want satisfaction,” the other growled, still keeping his revolver in his hand, though, hoping to catch his foe off his guard, so as to be able to raise the hammer.

The New England boy understood the game though as well as the ruffian himself, and watched him with the eyes of a lynx.

It was no idle threat he had made, for he had fully determined that if the bully attempted to cock the revolver, he would shoot him without mercy.

And in the firm gaze of Nimble Nick’s eyes, the Missouri Charmer read this determination, and he dared not attempt to raise the hammer, although he was thirsting for a chance to shed the blood of the man who had handled him so roughly.

“Ain’t you satisfied with what you have already received?” our hero demanded with a fine touch of sarcasm.

“It seems to me that you are hard to please; besides, you hav’n’t got this thing right.”

“I am the man who wants satisfaction, not you.”

“I have been robbed of about two hundred dollars, and as I have discovered my marked coins in your possession, I think the evidence is conclusive that you are the man who stole my money, and I either want it back or satisfaction for the loss.”

“Come out into the street and give me a chance to use my weapon, and I will give you all the satisfaction you want,” the Missouri Charmer exclaimed, growing fairly red in the face at being thus accused.

In truth, the narrow confines of the saloon were not suitable for a pistol duel, and, well filled as it was with people, the chances were great that some of them would be apt to stop a ball instead of the principals.

It is an old saying, west of the “Big Muddy,” and a very true one, that when it comes to a fight with firearms in a public place, the chances are ten to one that the bystanders will suffer more than the actual combatants.

“I’m your man anyway you choose to take me!” Nimble Nick replied, promptly.

“You are a mean, miserable, sneaking thief, who ought to be in jail, and a decent white man might well be excused from meeting you in a free fight, on the grounds that you are not worthy to stand up and face an honest man; but I will waive that, for I guess that about all the satisfaction I will get for the loss of my money will be what I can take out of your hide!”

“So put up your pistol and I will give you the squarest kind of a fight!”

The bully obeyed the command, for he saw that the young man meant “business.”

Then all within the saloon, with the exception of the attendants, filed into the street, and even the unfortunate souls who could not desert their posts, peered through the windows and out of the open door, anxious not to miss any of the fight.

The preliminaries of the contest were quickly arranged, and they were simple enough.

The two men were to stand a hundred paces apart—about two hundred feet in reality.

Then, at the word, they were to advance and fire.

It was not the first time that our boyish hero had faced a foe in hostile array, for upon one of his fishing trips to the Newfoundland waters, his crew had come in contact with the English fishermen who had essayed to seize upon the American nets, when the Yankees happened to go ashore to procure bait.

As it chanced, Nimble Nick had been left in charge of the boat, and a dozen of the foreign fishermen, rough, savage fellows, thought they would have an easy job in overawing the single Yankee, and so, with leveled weapons, they rushed upon him.

Our hero was provided with two self-cocking revolvers, and instead of surrendering at the approach of the armed foe, he showed fight, and beat off the attack, severely wounding two-thirds of the attackers; so upon this occasion he acted like an old stager, not displaying the least nervousness.

The frontier veterans—men who had “assisted” in quite a number of these “picnics”—nodded sagely to each other as they watched the cool and business-like way in which the young stranger prepared for the contest.

“I tell you, gen’lemen, in my opinion, it is ’bout four dollars to a spank on the jaw that the young cuss cleans out the Charmer!” one of the old frontiersmen declared.

“Our friend, Missouri, has got considerable sand, but he ain’t no first-class man with his weapons, nobow you kin fix it,” another of the wiseacres remarked.

And now that he was placed in battle array and beheld the quiet, yet confident, manner in which the other was carrying himself the bully began to have considerable doubts in regard to the wisdom of the course which he had adopted.

Still, under the circumstances, he did not exactly see what else he could have done.

He had been denounced as a thief and, what was worse, the accuser had brought forward evidence to prove that the charge was true.

After such a thing two courses only were open to him.

To either wipe out the accusation in the blood of his accuser or else to leave the town.

He had chosen the first, and now, having made the cast must stand the hazard of the die.

The signal for the fight to begin was given amid an almost breathless silence, and the moment the word was uttered the antagonists advanced rapidly toward each other.

Ten paces were covered by the fighters and then Nimble Nick came to a sudden halt, and the Missouri Charmer, anticipating from this that his opponent was about to discharge his weapon, made haste to get the first fire.

In his hurry his aim was faulty and the bullet flew wide of the mark.

Nimble Nick was not in the least disturbed by the attack, but raising his weapon took aim with a deliberate calmness that only served to render the bully more excited.

Our hero had his foe within range and felt satisfied that he held his life in the hollow of his hand, but he hesitated to fire because it really seemed to him like murder to kill the man.

At first—so incensed was he at the audacious robbery which had rendered him almost penniless—he had determined to kill the thief, but now that the time had come to perform the deed he hesitated.

A human life was worth more than a few paltry dollars, and although it could be urged in justification of the slaying that not only was the man seeking his life hot with rage, but that he was a scoundrel who richly deserved death, yet our hero hesitated to play the part of an executioner.

But in order to punish the man and give him a lesson which he would not be apt to forget in a hurry, Nimble Nick came to the determination to wound him in such a way that he would be disabled for a time.

The humane intentions of the New England boy were, however, frustrated by the actions of his antagonist.

The Missouri Charmer was seized with a sudden frenzy when he perceived that his own shot had been wasted and that Nimble Nick was taking deliberate aim at him.

In a fit of rage he resolved to close in with his opponent and come to short range, hoping by the bold attack to disconcert the other.

He fired another shot, as badly aimed as the first, and then rushed at the New England boy.

Nimble Nick saw that it would not do to hesitate and so imperil his own life.

Action must be taken quickly, and as the Missouri Charmer rushed toward him, he fired.

It had been the object of the New England boy to hit the ruffian in the shoulder, so that a severe wound, yet not a mortal one, might be inflicted. The onward movement of the ruffian caused the plan to miscarry.

The ball struck him a good three inches from the point at which Nimble Nick had aimed, and down tumbled the Missouri Charmer, writhing in the agonies of death.

The fight was ended, and, as the veterans had predicted from the start, with the defeat of the ruffian.

Some of his friends ran to the assistance of the stricken man, but by the time they reached his side the vital spark had fled.

“Is he dead?” asked our hero.

“Yes, you’ve cooked his goose for him, but no blame to you; it was a fair fight and no mistake,” one of the gray-bearded veterans answered.

Nimble Nick felt a hand upon his arm.

It was the friendly hotel clerk.

“Better come down to the hotel right away!” he whispered.

The advice seemed good and our hero went with the clerk.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ARREST.

“WELL, I didn’t really reckon that you would wipe that critter out, for he’s always been counted one of the ugliest men in the town to run afoul of,” the clerk remarked, as they walked along.

“I did not intend to kill the fellow, but when he came at me in that wild-bull fashion, I had to do the best I could.”

“Oh, he intended to kill you; there isn’t the least doubt about it.”

“It’s an unlucky business, the whole affair, for now you will have to get out.”

“How so?”

“Why, you will not be able to stay in the town after this business.”

“I don’t see why I can’t.”

“You have killed the man, you know!”

“Yes, I am aware of that fact, but it was in a fair fight, and he would have killed me if he had been able.”

“Of course I know that; but, you see, this fellow was a member of one of the worst gangs in the town, and now that you have slain their pard they will all go for you the first chance they get.”

“That is a game that two can play at,” Nim-

ble Nick replied, seemingly not in the least disturbed by the announcement.

"Oh, they are a bad lot, I tell you, and you can't hope to fight the whole gang, you know; they are toughs of the worst kind and they run this town."

"If you take my advice you will light out. That is the reason why I asked you to come down to the hotel—to give you a chance to get away, you know."

"Yes, but I don't relish the idea of running away," the New England boy replied.

"You will only get killed if you remain here," the other urged.

"You have seen what the chief of police amounts to. He will not dare to stand up for you, and in fact, most people think he is afraid of the gang, for he has never tried to run them out of the town."

"I have been here for some time and I know how the cat jumps."

"The gang will get together to-night, and they will be sure to come to the conclusion that you ought to be wiped out for the killing of the Missouri Charmer, and, after what they have seen of you to-night, they will not be apt to give you any show for your money, but a dozen or so of them will jump on you without warning."

"Now, if you take my advice, you will dust right out of here, and lively, too!"

"Surely the citizens of the town will not allow this gang of scoundrels to do exactly as they like?" Nimble Nick exclaimed.

"You don't understand how things have been running here," the clerk remarked.

"Of course there are plenty of good, solid men in the town, but they ain't united, and these scoundrels are, and then the police are on their side, too, or, if they ain't, they don't dare to say anything to them, which is just about as bad."

By this time the hotel was reached and the two entered.

"Well, I will think over the matter in the quiet of my room for a few moments, and then I shall probably be able to come to a decision; I may decide to go, but it will be awfully against my will though."

"It is the best thing you can do, honest," the hotel clerk urged.

In his room Nimble Nick sat down to reflect upon the matter.

So far his Western trip had been disastrous in the extreme.

Nearly all his money was gone, and now to be compelled to flee, like a thief in the night, from the town where he had met with such misadventures was particularly disagreeable.

About the only man he had encountered who was disposed to be friendly was the young hotel clerk, and Nimble Nick reasoned that as he knew the temper of the people of the town so well, perhaps it would be wise for him to adopt the advice tendered in such a friendly spirit.

Just as the New England boy came to this decision and rose to his feet, there was a knock at the door, then it opened, and the hotel clerk entered, followed by the chief of police.

From the anxious look upon the face of the young man, Nimble Nick had no difficulty in guessing that trouble was brewing.

"The chief has come to help you out of the scrape," the clerk observed.

"Yes, from the way things look I reckon that'll be a deuce of a ruction 'tween now and midnight," Breniker observed, with a wise shake of the head.

"The chief is anxious to do what he can for you," the hotel clerk hastened to explain.

"But, as I told you, the gang run the town, and he can't muster up force enough to fight them when they go upon the war-path."

"Oh, no, they are a holy terror when they get a-going!"

"The gang are talking about coming down here and taking you out for a hanging-match."

"And talking mighty loud, too!" the chief declared.

"You see, the fellow you laid out was one of the principal men of the crowd, and they are feeling awful sore over it, I tell you."

"The man provoked his fate," Nimble Nick observed.

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that. You have acted fair and above-board in the hull thing; but, you know, I warned you that if you went fooling around the Charmer you would get inter trouble."

"I didn't really reckon you would be able to lay the cuss out, though, but you have done it, all the same, and now the gang have got it in for you, red-hot."

"It is too late for you to think of getting

away now," the clerk remarked; "for the gang are on the alert, and are hanging around the hotel."

"Yes, they are talking about stringing you up in a pretty loud way," the official remarked.

"Some of the leading citizens of the town—real solid men, you know—came after me to take a hand in the game," the chief continued.

"They thought it was a darned shame for to have you abused, and wanted me to harr a finger in the pie."

"Now, I'm no fool, and any one who fries me for one will lose their fat."

"I know if the gang once get started that I can't fight 'em with my few men, and the most of my boys, too, are a leetle mixed up with these sharps, I reckon, and I couldn't depend upon them to do much fighting, and as for the citizens, they are allers ready to do a heap of talking, but that is about all."

"The only thing I kin do to help you is to run you into the calaboose under the pretense that I have arrested you for the murder of the Missouri Charmer, and when I tell the gang that you are going to be tried, and the chances are a thousand to one you will be hung, it will satisfy them, sec?"

Now although our hero did not at all relish being confined in the calaboose—the local name for the jail—yet, under the circumstances, he concluded to yield to the advice of the others.

"We kin fix the thing as slick as a whistle," the chief explained, chuckling over the shrewdness of his plan.

"When the gang see you lugged off to the jail, they will think you are gone up, for sure! It will be their game, you know, to pack the jury, so that you will be sure to be convicted."

"But after the storm has blown over, I can fix it so that you kin take French leave and give leg-bail some dark night, and then the gang can howl to their hearts' content."

The scheme was extremely distasteful to Nimble Nick, but he yielded a reluctant assent to it.

The chief had a posse of six men waiting below, all armed to the teeth, and under this guard the New England boy was conveyed to the calaboose, which was a stoutly-built, one-storied shanty, a short distance from the hotel.

Quite a crowd accompanied the "procession," and saw our hero safely landed in the jail, which was in charge of a dark-browed, sullen-looking fellow, who answered to the name of Bill Johnson.

There were three rooms in the jail; an outer one which answered for an office, and two parallel rooms back of it, in one of which the prisoners were confined, and the other the jailer occupied as a living room.

The chief, his posse, and the prisoner entered the jail, and the stout door was shut in the faces of the curious crowd, much to their disgust.

"Now, you are safe, and I reckon the galoots won't run things jest as they calculated upon!" Breniker exclaimed, with a chuckle.

"Hyer's yer prisoner, Mister Johnson, and be sure you take good care ov him."

"Oh, I'll attend to that," the jailer replied.

And then, to Nimble Nick's disgust, and despite his remonstrances, he was searched and his fire-arms removed, although he protested against being thus despoiled.

"We can't allow prisoners to have we'pons, you know," the jailer answered.

"Certainly not!" the chief declared.

"It's a mere form, you see, that's all."

Nimble Nick had to submit; but it was with a very ill grace.

Then the chief of police and his squad departed, first seeing the New England boy securely locked in his cell.

The apartment was about as scantily a furnished one as Nimble Nick had ever seen, for all the furniture it could boast was a heap of prairie hay in a corner, with a blanket spread over it, which served for a bed and a candle-box, turned up on end for a stool.

Johnson had been on the street at the time of the duel, so had witnessed the affair, and now that he and the prisoner were alone in the jail he felt a curiosity to converse with the young man.

"It 'pears to me from the looks of the young fellow that he has followed the sea for a living at some time, and I wouldn't mind having a talk with him," he remarked, communing with himself.

"There's a good three hours to bedtime and we might as well pass the minutes in chinning and swapping lies as to set with a locked door between us."

So he turned the key and invited Nimble Nick to come forth.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY.

"I THOUGHT that you might as well come out and be sociable," the jailer explained, as he invited the New England boy to take a seat at the table upon which burned a candle, dimly illuminating the room.

"Much obliged."

"More cheerful here than in your hole there in the dark."

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that."

"You laid that fellow out well to-night—I saw the fight."

"Yes, but I did not intend to kill him, although I haven't the least doubt that he richly deserved to die."

"He was a p'ison snake!" the jailer exclaimed, with a shake of the head.

"A p'ison snake, I tell yer! No worse in this 'ere town."

"Well, he'll never trouble any one more."

"Say! it 'pears to me there's something about you that seems to give out that you have been a sailor?"

"That is correct."

"Ah! you have follered the sea, then?"

"Yes, I was brought up on Cape Ann—that is in Massachusetts, you know—"

"Ay, ay, mate! I know all about it," the other interrupted.

"I'm from those parts myself—a little further to the east'ard, though, in the old Pine State. I'm a Maine man, I am."

"And have you been a sailor?" Nimble Nick asked, perceiving that the other had a sort of sailor look.

"Yes; I follered the sea from the time I was big enough to take my trick at the wheel up to 'bout a year ago, when I was persuaded by a chum of mine to try my luck out in this outlandish region."

"How have you prospered?"

"Not at all. I have managed to pick up a living, but that has been hard scratching."

"You see, I ran into bad luck right at the beginning. My mate had plenty of shot in his locker, and he had his eyes on a chance which he reckoned would pan out well; but on the very first night we struck the West he got too much rum on board, picked a quarrel with some strangers and was laid out, so I was left high and dry."

"Just by accident I managed to get to this town and struck this job, so I haven't starved to death, although I have come blamed near it."

"Hard lines," our hero observed.

"You can bet on that!" the jailer cried, emphatically.

"And the worst of the thing is, I don't see how I am ever going to get money enough together to get out of this hole."

"I am an able-bodied seaman, you know, and if I could reach any port where I could get a chance to ship, I wouldn't call the queen my uncle!"

"No, sir-ee! I wouldn't ask no odds of anybody, 'cos a single trip would put me ahead of the world; but, blame me if I know how I am ever going to get out of this!"

"I s'pose the only way I can work it will be to trust to Shank's mare and hoof it to Chicago, begging my way on the road like a durned tramp, and to an Eastern man, who has allers been able to hold his own, it will be hard lines, I tell yer!"

"Yes, it will be unpleasant, no doubt; but if it is the only thing to be done, you will have to make the best of it."

"You are a kind of a philosopher, you are," the other observed.

"But I don't doubt you are right, and that is the best way to look at it."

"You are from Cape Ann?"

"Yes, that is where I hail from."

"I have known a lot of likely chaps who were raised on the cape, but most all of them were fishermen. They claimed that paid better than following a sailor's life."

"Oh, yes, no doubt of that. An extra good trip to the banks will sometimes net a man a small fortune."

"How might I call you by name?"

"Monday—Nicholas Monday."

The jailer leaned back and surveyed the prisoner with an expression of vast astonishment.

"Nicholas Monday?" he queried.

"That is my name."

"Well, hang me, if that ain't queer."

"Yes, it is rather an odd name."

"Tain't that—'tain't that!" the jailer exclaimed. "I know 'tain't a common name, but I have in my time run afoul of too many queer crafts with odd hailing signs for to be astonished at anything in that line."

"What is there, then, strange about it?"

"Why, my father owned a little boat once—a sort of fishing-smack, which was called the Nicholas Monday."

It was now the New England boy's turn to betray agitation.

"Is that so?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, and the oddest thing about the matter is, that my brother and his wife set sail in the Nicholas Monday one night from Boston, bound to their home at Saco, State of Maine, and neither boat nor crew were ever heard of afterward."

"Was there a child—an infant, on board of the boat?" Nimble Nick inquired, anxiously, believing that at last he had found a clew by means of which the mystery which enveloped his birth could be dissolved.

"There was."

"I am that child! The boat was evidently wrecked during the night on the point of Cape Ann, for I was found, when an infant, one morning, after a severe storm, on the beach in the town of Rockport."

"I was in a box wrapped in a blanket, and from the wreckage which came ashore at the same time it was surmised that some craft in the night had struck on the rocks in endeavoring to round the point."

"But there was but little came ashore to give any clew to the craft, which had evidently gone to pieces on the rocks, excepting a piece of the stern with a name on it."

"'Nicholas Monday' was inscribed on the board, and it was supposed to be the name of the boat."

"This piece of the stern, the box, which contained myself, and a gallon jug with about a quart of rum in it was all that the waves cast upon the beach."

"That is it!" the jailer cried, abruptly.

"That is jest where the trouble was. It was that jug of rum that wrecked the boat."

"Both my brother and his wife were full of rum when they started from Boston, and I told 'em that they had better not drink any more, for both of them were like a pair of idiots when they got well-soaked."

"They lied and said they hadn't any more rum, but the jug shows that they had."

"There was a storm that night, and although my brother, Abner, was an able seaman and as accustomed to the water as any duck that was ever hatched, the rum was too much for him; he lost his bearings and cast his vessel away on the point of the cape."

"Yes, undoubtedly, that was the way the wreck occurred."

"He had a pretty rough passage, and I s'pose he was trying to get 'round the cape so as to make a harbor somewhere and lay up until the storm went down."

"I was cast ashore, not in the least harmed by the rough experience through which I had passed, and the old fisherman who discovered me brought me up as carefully as though I had been his own son; he bestowed upon me the name which he supposed had belonged to the craft which had brought me into the neighborhood, thinking that by so doing, in after years it might lead to the discovery of my parents."

"It was a cute idea," the jailer observed.

By this time the reader of course understands that Bill Johnson was in reality William Portland, Sailor Bill, who was introduced in the early part of our tale.

Sailor Bill's yarn as to how he happened to come so far from salt water was partially true only.

He and "his mate" had come West as he had related, but their departure from the East had been an enforced one.

They had tried a little highway robbery upon a drunken shipmate whom they knew had the savings of a long voyage in his pocket.

The man was not so drunk as not to know he was being robbed and made a desperate resistance.

They were compelled to use violence, for they were determined upon securing the plunder and the drunken fellow was so roughly handled that for a time it was expected that he would not survive.

This incident forced the footpads to seek safety in flight, and as the police evinced an ardent desire to get hold of them they did not think it wise to pause until they had put a good many hundred miles between themselves and all possible pursuit.

The first stop they made was at Omaha, and as Omaha was a particularly lively town at the time, being the headquarters of the railroad men the pair thought it would be just the place for them.

But sharp as were the two they were no match

for the gang with whom they came in contact, and in two nights' time they lost nearly all their money.

Then they fell back upon their old game and took to the highway.

But the average man on the frontier is far better prepared for a game of this kind than the Eastern citizen, and in the very first man they encountered they caught a Tartar.

For instead of throwing up his hands and allowing the footpads to "go through" him, he displayed a cocked revolver which he had in his pocket in readiness for just such an occurrence, and promptly shot Sailor Bill's pard, and, undoubtedly would have closed Sailor Bill's account with this world if that worthy had not taken to his heels and fled so speedily that his pace would not have disgraced a professional foot-racer.

Judging that this adventure would be apt to make the town too red-hot to hold him, Sailor Bill came to Cheyenne, and was lucky enough to secure the position of jailer.

During the seventeen years that have elapsed between the time that we introduced him to our readers on the night when he abducted the child at the bidding of the stranger and was so cleverly tricked by that worthy, and the present when we again come across him in the town of Cheyenne, Sailor Bill's life had run in its usual channel, but wherever he went he kept a watch for the man who had both used and abused him.

He was hungry for vengeance; but in all his wandering he never encountered the stranger.

Now though, fate willed that he should be brought face-to-face with the being whom he believed had come to an untimely end in the depths of old ocean, years ago.

"Yes, yes, it was a cute idea—a very cute idea," Sailor Bill repeated.

"For if you hadn't been given that name I never should have known that you were the babby who was on my brother Abner's craft, when he sailed from Boston harbor on that dark night nigh onto seventeen years ago."

Nimble Nick had not been particularly impressed with the looks of the jailer, and the thought came up in his mind that if this accidental meeting was to bring to light the fact that he was a relative of this ill-looking fellow, it would have been better if he had not come in contact with him.

"Yes, sir-ee, you are the long-lost child, and I s'pose you have often wondered whose chick you was," Sailor Bill observed, in a thoughtful manner.

"Of course all connected with my birth and parentage is involved in the deepest kind of mystery. I am a foundling cast up by the sea, and as these many years have passed without my gaining any clew to solve the riddle, I had come to the conclusion the chances were good that I should never know the truth of the matter."

"Well, astonishing as it may seem to you, I can't do much at clearing up the muddle, although it was through me that you happened to come on my brother Abner's boat."

"Is that possible?"

"Yes; a few words will spin the yarn."

And then Sailor Bill proceeded to relate the particulars concerning the abduction, all of which the reader already knows.

But the ancient scoundrel was careful to tell his tale so as to make his part in the transaction appear in a far different light from what it really was.

According to his artful statement he had gone into the affair for the sole purpose of saving the child from the designs of the villain who wished to kill it.

"Then you hav'n't any idea of who this man was?" Nimble Nick asked, when the other finished his recital.

"Not the least bit of an idea, and though I hunted high and low for him I could not get on his track."

"It is a strange affair."

"You can bet it is, mate, and I tell you what it is, in my opinion there's a deal of money in it."

"Do you think so?"

"That is the reckoning I came to. Jest figure onto the thing yourself," Sailor Bill observed, shrewdly. "What reason had the man to want to kill you if you wasn't the heir to some big money which would come to him or somebody that he could control."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ATTACK.

THE young man pondered over the matter for a moment. The conclusion at which the other had arrived seemed to him to be warranted by the circumstances.

"What do you think about it?" the old fellow queried. "Don't it 'pear to you as if I had come pretty nigh the mark?"

"I think you are about right, but from the way the thing is, the chances appear to me to be about a million to one against my ever finding out the truth of the matter."

"Well, wasn't that what I said?" the other remarked.

"Didn't I tell you that I couldn't give you much information?"

"I did my level best years ago, after I got back to this country from my voyage to foreign ports."

"I was so wrathful at being tricked by the infernal scoundrel, that I would have hunted him to the very ends of the earth."

"But you cannot do much hunting arter a man when you can't succeed in striking his track."

"I hunted high and low, but it was no go! I couldn't find any more trace of him than if he hadn't existed at all."

"Oh, I tell you, he covered up his tracks mighty well. I s'pose he thought I would get back some time, and that I would be apt to make it hot for him if I could succeed in finding him, and I would too, you can bet on that!"

And the vindictive manner in which the old man spoke, made it apparent that this was no idle boast.

Our hero was disappointed.

He had hoped when the old man began his story he would be able to clear up a little of the dark mystery which enveloped his early life, but now that the tale was told he saw that he was as far from the truth as ever.

The two sat and talked until after midnight, and then the young man sought his couch, while the jailer extended himself upon the rude bunk which formed part of the scanty furniture adorning his apartment.

Soon he dropped off to sleep, but like all men used to a seafaring life, his slumbers were so light that he was quickly aroused when some one on the outside tapped on the heavy shutter which guarded the small window in the side wall of the apartment.

From the peculiar way in which the party without tapped on the window, the old salt jumped to the conclusion that the idea was to arouse him without alarming the prisoner.

He had not taken the trouble to remove any of his clothes—not even his boots, before lying down, so it only took him a moment to abandon the bunk and advance to the window.

"Hallo! who's there?" he asked, speaking in a low and cautious tone.

"It's me—Breniker," responded the official with that lofty disregard of the rules of speech common to ignorant men.

"Yes, yes, I recognize your voice. What do you want?"

"Open the shutter and the window so I can talk to you."

The request was couched in low and cautious tones, and Sailor Bill guessed that something important was on the carpet.

"Be careful not to make a noise, so as to wake the cuss in the other room," the chief of police continued.

"All right."

As quietly as possible the jailer undid the shutter-fastenings, swung it open, and then raised the window.

"Say, thar's going to be the deuce to pay!" Breniker exclaimed, but taking care not to speak much louder than a whisper.

"How's that?"

"The friends of the Charmer have been talking 'bout his death, and they are jest hot for vengeance."

"You don't say?"

"Fact; they are talking of Judge Lynch in the strongest kind of way, and I think the chances are big that thar will be a mob up hyer afore daybreak."

"What is to be done?"

"Durned if I know," responded the chief with a shake of the head.

"Can't you raise a gang for to hold the fort and beat the party off?"

"Not much," responded the other, decidedly.

"Can't you do it?"

"Why, man alive, the hull town is up! The Charmer had a heap of friends, and they are going to string this galoot up afore he is two hours older."

"Don't you make any mistake about it, either, and if you ain't anxious for to be wiped out with him, you had better not have anything to do with the picnic. The gang will be so big that it will take an army for to hold 'em back."

"I don't want any of it in mine, I tell you."

"Well, I ain't spoiling for to oppose any sich crowd," Sailor Bill asserted.

"Of course not! I reckon your head is screwed on straight."

"Wa-al, when I heerd what was up, I thought I had better come and give you a hint, 'cos, if you didn't know how things was, when the gang comes you might feel inclined to talk sassy to them, and I tell you what it is, old n.an, that is jest the kind of game you don't want to play, 'cos when these sports get on the war-path, one man more or less to them don't matter and if you tried to have any funny business with them the odds are big that they would go for you in a way that would be apt to make you howl."

"Oh, no, I ain't the kind of man to try any funny business with any such gang!"

"Wa-al, now, I tell yer, I don't keer two cents about the matter, anyway."

"The chances are big that if the galoot was tried he would be hung, for the Charmer had so many friends in town that the jury would be sure to be packed with them, so, as long as he is going up anyway, what does it matter whether it is done first or last?"

"Not a mite."

"That is what I think, and so I'm jest going to let the gang run the thing. My idee is to get out of the way, so that I will not know anything about the matter until the job is done."

"Say, would that be a good thing for me to do?" ejaculated Sailor Bill, as the idea came into his mind.

"Mebbe it would."

"In a picnic of this kind the boys are inclined to be a leetle hasty, sometimes—a leetle quick on the trigger, you know."

"No doubt, no doubt!" the other assented. "Particularly when the most of the crowd have a deal more liquor on board than they can carry with comfort."

"Yes, and in their hurry and excitement some one of the gang might plug me."

"Like as not."

"I'll jest lock the place up and get out, and then when the gang come, they can break into it, and do just as they please without any one 'round to hinder 'em."

"That is a good idea; that's the game you want to play," the official declared.

"But, I say, how about the prisoner? Is he all safe?"

"Oh, yes; locked in his room, and sound asleep before this."

"You searched him and took his arms away, didn't you?"

"Yes, but all I got was a single revolver, and I didn't go through him very thoroughly."

"Mebbe he has some other weapons hidden in his clothes."

"That ain't likely."

"Had I better wake him up and see?"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't do that. I reckon the revolver was all he had. He's a stranger, you know, and doesn't go as well-heeled as our boys."

"Let him alone, and dust out quietly in the next half-hour or so, for I reckon it will double that time afore the picnic starts."

"All right; I'll do it."

"I say, I'll wait for you at the Chicago House, and you come straight there."

"I will."

And then the chief departed.

The jailer closed the window, fastened the shutter again carefully and fell to meditating over the situation.

"I have got the thing down fine," he muttered at last, communing with himself after the fashion common to individuals who lead solitary lives.

"This is all a put-up job from beginning to end. The gang are afraid of this young feller, and they ain't anxious to meet him in a fair fight after the way that he laid out their pal."

"And they feel pretty certain, too, that there will not be anything done to him because he had the luck to kill a man in a fair fight."

"But they are bound to get even with him, though, and if they cannot lay him out in a fair way, they are going to try for to ring in a 'brace' on him."

"And that is where the chief of police and the arrest comes in."

"He is arrested, locked up, and his weapons taken away."

"Then, in the middle of the night, when all the decent men who might interfere are sound asleep, the gang calculates to jump in and hang him, and as he hasn't got any weapons for to make a fight, it looks as if they had got a pretty soft thing of it."

Then the old sailor was silent for fully five minutes, busy in reflection.

"And they have got a soft thing, too—a very soft thing," he muttered at last.

"If I don't interfere."

"I could upset the whole thing if I wanted to!"

"P'haps I could fix it so that the young cuss could get out of the scrape, but I could arrange the business in such a way that he would be able to give them the biggest kind of a fight."

"I had this idea kinder faint in my mind, too, when I said to that durned chief of police that, mebbe, the young fellow had some weapons hidden away."

"Men have been known to carry pistols and knives and such things in their boots, and who knows but what this young feller is well fixed in that way?"

"I kinder owe him a good turn for that old business years ago, and as I ain't so young as I once was, mebbe, I better pay the debt now, for I may never have another chance."

Having come to this decision, the jailer rose and unlocked the door of the prisoner's cell.

The slight noise he made in entering immediately aroused our hero, who was a light sleeper.

"Don't be alarmed. It is only the boss who runs the calaboose," Sailor Bill exclaimed.

"There's mischief afoot, and I have come to put you on your guard."

Our hero was at attention in a moment.

The jailer related what had occurred.

"It is all a skin game from beginning to end," he said in conclusion.

"The idea was to lock you up here, git your weapons, and then raise a gang and go for you. Now I ain't a saint—ain't any better than I ought to be—but durn me if I am going to see you murdered without being able to help yourself!"

"Here's a pair of revolvers—self-cockers and good tools. Take 'em, and do the best you can for yourself."

The prisoner thanked the jailer in a suitable manner, and then Sailor Bill departed.

"Mebbe we'll meet again," he said, as he prepared to close the door. "Mebbe we'll be able to git on the track of that leetle mystery and clear it up, but I reckon it will be pretty near a miracle if we do."

Sailor Bill carefully locked the door again and then left the calaboose, taking his way to the hotel, where the chief of police expected him.

CHAPTER XII.

A DESPERATE VENTURE.

As the jailer passed through the street he noticed that ruffianly-looking men were congregated in the neighborhood of the jail apparently on the watch, and when he reached the Chicago House he found quite a crowd of rough characters assembled.

He had been long enough in the town to know the character of the different townsmen tolerably well, and he recognized that all of the men hanging around the hotel were fellows who bore the worst of reputations.

"Wa-al, is it all right? Did you leave the galoot safe and sound?" the chief of police asked, as Sailor Bill made his appearance.

"Oh, yes, as sound as a bug in a rug," the jailer answered.

"But I tell you what it is, chief, I don't feel quite right 'bout not searching the feller again," Sailor Bill remarked, with a dubious shake of the head.

"Oh, nonsense!" the other cried.

"Didn't you search him once? Isn't that enough?"

"Yes, but it wasn't much of a search, you know. No search at all, to come right down to the truth of it," the jailer replied, apparently not at all satisfied with the way that things had gone.

"All I did was to ax him for his weapons and take 'em when he handed 'em out; all I got, you know, was a revolver."

"And that is all he had, of course," the chief responded, evidently not at all troubled about the matter.

"Don't you worry 'bout that. A galoot of his kidney don't go heeled like a man who knows how things ought to be."

Sailor Bill said no more.

His object in speaking was to prevent the gang from having any suspicion that he had anything to do with the matter, when they assaulted the jail and found the prisoner ready to receive them, armed to the teeth.

After a while the chief sauntered out of the saloon and the gang speedily followed him.

Sailor Bill understood that the "picnic" would soon begin and he slipped quietly out of the saloon.

As he had anticipated there was a crowd gathering around the calaboose.

The gang to which the Charmer belonged numbered some twenty men, all anxious to revenge the death of their associate, and in addition to these were some twenty more, the riff-raff of the town, bummers and loafers generally who had been attracted by the report that there was "fun" ahead.

As in all cases of this kind the mob was composed of as many men who merely designed to look on and see the sights, as it was of those who intended to take an active part in the proceedings.

The twenty odd fellows who moved forward to storm the calaboose all wore black masks as a sort of disguise.

A useless precaution as nearly every one of the band could be easily identified by his clothes.

At the head of the party too was Breniker, the chief of police.

He though had taken pains to put on a different coat from the one which he usually wore and also another hat.

This was in deference to the public opinion, which would be apt to think that the chief of police would be better employed in protecting the prisoner than in heading a party of lynchers.

The masked men carried a stout beam with them for the purpose of bursting in the doors of the jail.

All went gayly forward for they did not anticipate that they would have the least trouble in executing their scheme.

What resistance could a helpless, unarmed prisoner make against so great a force of armed men?

By the time the crowd arrived in the neighborhood of the calaboose, the moon was up, so that there was plenty of light.

The lynchers advanced in a solid body to the door which gave entrance to the building, poised the beam and then waited for the word of command.

The chief of police was in the command of the party; and on his arm he carried a coil of rope.

With this it was intended that the culprit should be hanged, for the gang had determined that the young man who had succeeded in dispatching their comrade without any trouble should die the death of a dog.

"Don't use your revolvers if you can help it," Breniker cautioned.

"Excepting that if he shows fight you can club him over the head with the butts for to take the ugliness out of him."

"Now, are you all ready?—let her go!"

Bang went the heavy beam against the door, bursting it from the hinges immediately for it had never been calculated to stand any such rough treatment.

In rushed the gang, carrying the beam with them; the idea of this was to use it to force open the door of the room where the prisoner was confined—the cell, so to speak.

This second door was even more frail than the outer one, and with a single thrust the masked men burst it open.

Then they dropped the beam and were about to rush in for the purpose of seizing the prisoner, when our hero appeared on the threshold, a revolver in each hand.

The gang hesitated.

This was not the kind of picnic which they had expected.

It was one thing to seize upon and hang a defenseless prisoner, quite another to confront a desperate man with the engines of death clasped firmly in his hands.

"Keep back, for I am armed, and I warn you that I will sell my life dearly!"

For a moment they hesitated, and then with a yell they rushed upon him.

It was not to be expected that twenty such desperadoes as these were to be held in check by a single man.

As they rushed forward the young man fell back, jumping nimbly to one side to avoid the fire which they opened upon him.

But as they came rushing through the doorway, Nibble Nick, recognizing that he was engaged in a fight to the death, and that if he did not succeed in beating his assailants and defeating the attack his own life would pay the forfeit, did not hesitate to fire to kill.

It was a splendid pair of tools that Sailor Bill had given him, and he fired four shots with lightning-like rapidity.

"Every bullet has its billet" is the old soldier saying, and on this occasion it was certainly true, for a man fell at every shot.

The first one down was the burly Breniker, the

chief of police, killed on the instant, a bullet in his brain.

The second man also fell, writhing in the agonies of death, but the others, although severely wounded, were yet lucky enough to escape the sudden death which had so unexpectedly struck down their companions.

Boldly the ruffians had rushed to the attack because confident in their numbers, they never for an instant imagined that the single man would be able to offer effective resistance to their onset, although they could see that he was armed, and it was certain he would attempt to use his weapons to the best advantage.

What deceived the disguised chief of police though and made him rush so boldly forward to his death was the fact that he had noticed that the hammers of Nimble Nick's revolvers were not raised.

And his idea had been to overpower the New England boy before he could get a chance to cock his weapons.

Breniker was not noted for being a brainy man, and the thought that Nimble Nick might be armed with self-cocking, double-acting pistols, never entered his head.

The downfall of the first four men checked the rush at once.

The New England boy had meditated over the situation while waiting for the attack to be made upon him and he had come to the conclusion that the best thing for him to do would be to shake the dust of Cheyenne from his feet as soon as possible.

He had incurred the enmity of a lot of desperate men and though he might prove the victor in this struggle, yet in the long run the chances were great that they would succeed in getting "square" with him for having killed their "pard," the notorious Missouri Charmer.

And now that he saw the murderous gang fall back, awed by the downfall of their leaders, our hero judged that the time had come for him to make a desperate rush for liberty.

He had seen gangs of roughs before, and he understood how easy it was to throw them into a panic.

Such miserable creatures were always hot for blood when they fancied that they had everything their own way, but when the tables were turned and they came face to face with death, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred they would run at the top of their speed like a lot of mongrel curs when a bull-dog makes his appearance in their midst.

Acting on this idea, the moment the four men were down and the rest recoiled, Nimble Nick charged at them with as much courage as though he had a regiment at his back.

"Give way there, you coward dogs!" he cried, enforcing the command with a revolver-bullet.

He was careful to fire but one, for he was afraid that after he got out of the house he should need every bullet that he could muster.

He had judged rightly in regard to the bravery of the ruffians.

The moment that Nimble Nick advanced upon them they fled in wild disorder.

Each man acting on the old-time motto:

"Run, and may Old Nick take the hindmost!"

In this case it was Young Nick, but he exercised as potent an influence as though he had been the old gentleman in person.

Purposely, the New England boy had fired high so that his bullet whistled over the heads of the ruffians, his purpose being more to scare than to wound.

The gang were terribly frightened and hastened from the building in the utmost confusion, crowding and jostling against each other.

In the excitement, revolvers were discharged and a half a dozen were accidentally wounded by the random shots.

When he reached the outer door, Nimble Nick discharged another shot at the fugitives, and then he dodged quickly around the further corner of the house so as to get in the shadow.

And this movement was performed so quickly that none of the ruffians, running at the top of their speed, anxious to get out of the range of the death-dealing bullets, noticed that the prisoner had quitted the house.

Around the corner of the building, Nimble Nick stumbled over a man who was reclining against the house, evidently having been wounded in the rush.

It was Sailor Bill who had been unlucky enough to stop one of the random bullets, although he had kept well in the rear so as to be out of danger.

The New England boy recognized the old salt immediately, and urgent as was the necessity

for haste, stopped to exchange a word with him.

"Are you wounded?"

"Mortally, I guess; I'm all ready to let go my anchors and make a port in another world," the old man answered, with a groan.

"Can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing, but crack on all sail and get away as soon as you can. I've been a tough bit of timber all my life, but I did you a good turn this time, and that squares the reckoning atween us—I—"

And then with a gasp, Sailor Bill gave up the ghost.

Nimble Nick again took to flight, and succeeded in making his escape.

He had had enough of the wild West, and headed straight for Omaha, where he arrived in due time.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW DEPARTURE.

AND now our hero found himself face to face with the problem, "what was best to be done?"

Omaha was a wild enough town, but it was no such place as the "city" which he had been compelled to leave in so unceremonious a manner.

Thanks to the reserve fund which he had taken pains to hide away so carefully, he was in a condition to be able to look about him for some time.

He hated to return to the East immediately.

The old saying that one swallow doesn't make a summer, rose in his mind, and he reflected that it was really unfair to judge all the West by the single town where he had fared so roughly.

Other places might prove kinder.

He was in a quandary in regard to what he should do, though.

His idea in coming to this new country was in obedience to the doctrine then so widely advocated of going West to grow up with the land, and by means of the money which he had saved, he hoped, after becoming acquainted with the lay of the land, to use the sailor phrase, to invest his little capital in some business which would pay him well for his trouble.

But now that scheme could not be carried out. His money being gone, he could not possibly invest in anything, and must depend upon getting some kind of a situation.

Just exactly what to strike for, though, was a puzzle.

His early training had not fitted him for a clerk's position; although he had had a good education, yet he was no bookkeeper, and had not the least experience in either buying or selling.

Nor was he a mechanic, able to fall back on his trade.

"Confound the luck!" he ejaculated, after he had walked the streets of the dusty city for a day without being able to perceive the least bit of an opening.

"I ought to have learned some kind of a trade, then I would not be in this scrape."

As in the East, there was an abundance of young fellows anxious to "clerk it," or to secure some other easy job, where neither skill with tools or hard manual labor was required, while there was a dearth of mechanics, for the town was building up rapidly, and the inhabitants had already begun to brag that it was going to be "the biggest place on the river," and, in fact, the more sanguine did not hesitate to declare that it was going to be the biggest place west of the Mississippi—another Chicago in reality.

Small circumstances in this life sometimes exert great influence over the destinies of individuals, and in this case a slight, and seemingly unimportant thing was fated to change the whole current of our hero's life.

When he had arrived in the town, warned by his previous experience, the young adventurer did not go to a hotel, but sought quarters at a small, cheap boarding-house on the outskirts of Omaha.

There were only a half a dozen boarders in the house, and among them was one young man who was connected with a small circus which had found its way to the town, and was about to give a series of exhibitions there.

The young man was a jolly sort of fellow, and at first sight took a decided liking to our hero.

The two were room-mates, and the young man did not hesitate to tell his companion the whole history of the show.

McGibbons's Mammoth Hippodrome was the name of the concern.

Quite an imposing appellation; but as Charley

Franks—so the young fellow was called—revealed to his companion, the name was the best thing about the circus.

"It is only a kind of a fake show, anyway," Franks observed, prone like all new men in the "profession" to use the slang terms peculiar to the business as much as possible.

Now, when it came to circuses, our hero was at home, for he had seen all the big ones in the country which had existed during the last ten years, but in regard to their private life he of course knew nothing.

The subject was full of interest to him, though, and he listened with eager ears to his companion's conversation.

"Yes sir-ee, nothing but a fake show!" the young man repeated with strong emphasis.

"I am afraid that you are too much for me. I don't understand what that means, although I suppose it is an insinuation that the concern isn't as good as it ought to be."

"You have hit the nail right on the head!" the other declared with a knowing wink.

"From the name one would be apt to believe that it was a great concern."

"Of course, and that is where the joke comes in. Are you posted on the show business?"

Our hero was obliged to confess that his knowledge was limited.

"All I know about them is what I have seen from the auditoriums."

"Well I am an old hand at the game," Franks remarked with a self-satisfied air.

"I have an uncle who has been in the business for twenty years, and as this is my second season with a show, I am pretty well posted myself."

New England Nick was too shrewd not to perceive that his new acquaintance was inclined to boast, but then, as he was thoroughly good-natured, and his bragging harmed no one, it was not so great a fault.

"Yes, I see."

"Oh, I bet you! What I don't know about the biz ain't worth knowing!"

"The whole trouble with this gang that I am with now is that there isn't any money at the back of the concern."

"Wind is all right for a while, as long as it is smooth sailing, but when you come to strike rainy weather and bad business then if there isn't any ducats in the strong box, the concern is going to bust, sure as you're born."

Our hero nodded assent; there wasn't any disputing such a statement.

"And that is what is the matter with Hannah in this case," the other continued.

"We started out from St. Louis with the idea of working up into this region where a big show never comes."

"It was a pretty good little party when we started. There was twenty horses and about thirty men all told, and we give a good show for so light-weighted a party, for old McGibbons is a veteran, one of the oldest showmen in the country, and he understands how to put a show together, although he has been in hard luck for the last three or four years."

"That is bad."

"Yes, but showmen have these ups and downs. It is the most uncertain business in the world," the young man explained.

"A man may be worth a hundred thousand this year and be glad to get a chance at the free lunch counter the next."

"Well, that is an uncertain kind of life."

"You can bet on it."

"We didn't do any business from the start. It rained three nights a week right along for the first month—and how it does pour down out in these parts when it starts into business on a large scale."

"We had a young sport from St. Louis along who had put up the sugar—the money, you know—"

Our hero nodded.

"To start the thing. He had the usual idea that all these angels get—the angel, you understand and is the man who finds the money to start the concern on the road."

"A very suitable name, I should say."

"Yes; well, as I was saying, his idea in regard to the show business was the one that about all of these outsiders get."

"He thought all he had to do was to find the money to put the concern on the road, and then the money would come 'tumbling in,' as the old song says."

"And it didn't eh?" asked the other, anticipating what was coming.

"Not by a jugful!" replied young Franks, emphatically.

"On the contrary, owing to the bad weather it tumbled out in a way that made the sport extremely sick."

He stood it like a hero for a month through and then quit in disgust.

"That was in Nebraska City—the next stand down the river, you know—and it looked as if that would wind up the show, for the old man was away behind with everybody.

"But McGibbons is the sweetest talker you ever heard and I'm blessed if he didn't rope another angel in.

"An old stockman with a thousand 'chucks' in his 'leather,' and he put the concern on its legs and brought us in here, demoralized but still alive and kicking.

"We are reduced to ten horses and twenty men but we will give a good show when we get at it to-morrow afternoon and if the rain don't get after us again, I shouldn't be surprised if we pulled big money out of this town, for everybody seems to be wild for the show."

A brilliant idea occurred to our young adventurer and he lost no time in communicating it to his newly made acquaintance.

Would it be possible for him to get anything to do with the party, as he had always had a natural liking for such a life?

The young man thought that it would, and if he was able to do any riding or tumbling he undoubtedly would get a pretty fair salary.

"But McGibbons is a crusty old customer, and if you apply to him the chances are a hundred to one that you will not be able to do anything with him; but I will tell you how you can work it."

Then the young man explained that attached to the show was a trick mule, and one of the acts in the ring consisted of the clown introducing the mule and offering a prize to any one in the audience who could succeed in riding him.

A good rider could perform the feat easily enough, but as it was always clownish country boys who attempted the trick, they failed.

"If you can ride the mule, the old man will talk to you quickly enough."

So our hero resolved to attempt the feat.

And on the next afternoon, when the customary proclamation was made by the clown, our hero leaped into the ring.

In reality he was a far better rider than he thought he was, and, to the amazement of the circus men, he accomplished the feat.

This triumph served as an introduction to the old showman, and when our hero showed that he could also "tumble" as well as he could ride, an engagement was quickly made.

With this party our hero traveled, until the approach of winter brought the season to an end.

By this time he had made such progress in this new calling that he was regarded as one of the most promising performers in the business.

The next year he procured an engagement with a regular first-class show.

All winter long New England Nick, as he was commonly termed by his associates, practiced steadily under the care of a veteran performer, who had a training-barn where horses during the winter season were broken for circus purposes, and when he started in the spring, his improvement was so great that all acquainted with the facts predicted that in time he would be one of the greatest riders in the country.

New laurels he won, and in the East, too, where the audiences were familiar with the work of the best performers.

CHAPTER XIV. IN THE SOUTH.

NIMBLE NICK'S advancement this season was rapid, and the old rider and acrobat, who acted as his instructor, declared that there wasn't the least doubt he was born for just such a life, or else he would never have been able to go ahead so speedily.

Within four months' time our hero was able to get an advanced salary with this new show, and was rated as being one of the most useful men in the party.

Business had been fairly profitable with the show, but as the proprietors had not made the money which they expected, and so came to the conclusion to extend the season, instead of closing at the approach of cold weather, as is the usual custom of nearly all tent shows, they kept on, and went South through Virginia, working down through the seaboard States, intending to pass the winter in the extreme South.

And so it happened that on a bright December morning Nimble Nick made his *entree* into the old city of Savannah, riding in the circus procession.

The show was booked for a three days' stay in Savannah, and before the end of the first day

came, the circus proprietors were sorry that they hadn't arranged to stay a week, for the tent was crowded to overflowing at both afternoon and evening performances.

It was the first circus which had visited the city for a year, and the inhabitants seemed to fairly go wild over the show.

And when the performance ended, and the circus folks returned to their hotel, they found a couple of dozen of the young bloods of the city, anxious to make their acquaintance, so that they might entertain the strangers in the good old Southern style.

As a rule the circus boys are not averse to this sort of thing, and although Nimble Nick was noted for his avoidance of all dissipation of this kind, yet the young fellows, who were scions of the best families of the city, were so pressing in their hospitality, that our hero could not refuse their requests to take a glass or two of wine with them.

They were all good fellows, and one in particular made himself extremely agreeable to Nimble Nick.

Harry Oglethorpe he was called, a descendant of the ancient family so prominent in the history of Georgia.

Himself and Nimble Nick were a little apart from the rest so that they were able to converse without interruption.

"Do you know, Mr. Monday, that you do not seem like a stranger to me?" the young Southerner said.

"Is that possible?"

"Yes, I am certain I have met you before. Is this your first visit to this section?"

"It is."

"It is very strange, for your face is very familiar to me, although at present I cannot seem to remember where I saw you, or under what circumstances, but that I have met you somewhere—or somebody who bears a great resemblance to you, I am certain."

"Well, I have never been South before, but you may have visited the North."

"I have never been north of Washington."

"Nor I south of the capital until this trip."

"It is certainly the strangest thing I know of," the young Southerner remarked in a puzzled way.

"Why, the very moment you made your appearance in the ring this evening I said to a couple of friends who were with me, that you were an old acquaintance, but when I further said, that for the life of me I could not place you, they laughed at me, but if I haven't met you then you resemble in the strongest manner some one with whom I have been well acquainted."

"Not only in your face and bearing, but in the way you speak and the tones of your voice."

"It is odd, but I presume you have hit upon the true solution of the riddle when you remark that it is one of those strange resemblances which sometimes occur, for as you have never been North and I have not visited the South before this trip, it is quite certain that we could not have met."

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a tall, rather shabbily-dressed man, with a face strongly marked with the lines of dissipation. He was a man of fifty or thereabouts and from his appearance one could easily tell that for years he had been leading a fast life.

He swaggered up to the bar, in close proximity to where the two young men stood, and called for a glass of brandy in a loud and arrogant tone.

From the peculiar obsequious way in which the bartender hurried to wait upon him the New England boy guessed that the new-comer was a man who was apt to make himself particularly disagreeable at times.

The brandy was served; the stranger tossed a coin upon the counter, took up his glass and half-turning as he was in the act of raising it to his lips caught sight of Nimble Nick only a yard away.

"Dick Oglethorpe!" he gasped, as he staggered back, his face as white as though he had seen a ghost and the glass dropping from his nervous hand.

"What's the matter, colonel?" cried the bartender, while the rest gathered around, anxious to know what had happened.

"It was all over in a moment though and the 'colonel' made a lame explanation about being attacked with a sudden faintness."

"A slight attack only, gentlemen; much obliged for your kind attention. I am getting old, you know, and must expect to get a twinge now and then. It's a pity to waste good brandy though," he added, as he glanced, regretfully, at the fragments of the shattered glass

"Oh, that is all right! Have one with me this time!" exclaimed the proprietor, hastening to provide a fresh supply.

The colonel graciously condescended to drink with the owner, and the rest returned to their conversation.

The muttered exclamation which had escaped from the colonel's lips had only been heard by Nimble Nick and the Southerner with whom he was conversing.

After drinking the brandy the colonel leaned over the bar and in an undertone said to the proprietor:

"Who is this young man with Harry?"

"One of the circus fellows."

"I think I have seen him somewhere. What is his name?"

"Monday, I think, Nick Monday."

The colonel shook his head.

"No, I don't know him; so long!"

Then he departed.

"Did you notice that it was the catching sight of your face that made him drop his glass?" the Southerner asked after the colonel was gone.

"It certainly looked like it."

"Not a doubt about it, and did you hear what he said?"

"He muttered a name—Dick Oglethorpe."

"Yes, exactly, and I don't wonder at his astonishment, for Dick Oglethorpe is the man whom you resemble so greatly."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, you are enough like him to be his son, although as he was never married, he never had any children."

"That man is an Oglethorpe, too, as I am, and we are related though distantly. All of us Oglethorpes came from one head."

"He is Colonel John Oglethorpe, and one of the hardest nuts in Savannah, a gambler, a hard drinker and a disreputable character generally, although as he is a dead slot, few people care to incur his ill-will."

"His history is a strange one. He was a cousin of Dick Oglethorpe, who on the death of his father inherited a vast property."

"The colonel had nothing, for his father died poor, but as he and Dick were bosom friends he never lacked for money."

"The two had been brought up together and were more like brothers than cousins."

"One summer they went on a trip north together and then to England."

"From that trip Dick Oglethorpe never returned. He died at sea and his body was committed to the deep."

"He left a will bequeathing all his property to the colonel; this was about eighteen or twenty years ago, and in that time this man has led such a life that he hasn't a penny left of the great Oglethorpe estate."

"In fact he has led so fast a life that men who know him best suspect he has some terrible secret weighing on his mind, and that he drinks and gambles as he does to drown remembrance."

"It is a strange tale and odd that I should resemble this dead Dick Oglethorpe."

And as Nimble Nick spoke there was a wild thought in his mind.

Could it be possible that he was any kin to this man whom he so strangely resembled, and who had found an unmarked grave amid the green Atlantic billows?

Was this dark-browed colonel the man who had hired Sailor Bill to abduct the child?

If Sailor Bill had not come to an untimely end in the wilds of the West, possibly he could have thrown some light on this mystery.

But if Dick Oglethorpe was never married and had left a will, giving all his estate to his cousin, it did not seem probable that he had left an heir.

"Yes, it is very odd indeed, but still this world is full of just such odd things."

After a while the party broke up and Nimble Nick retired to rest, his head full of this strange event.

Try as he would to dismiss the subject it haunted him, and it was not until the early morning hours that sleep came to his relief.

The feeling was strong within him that a crisis of his life was near at hand, and that in the near future something important would occur to him.

If Sailor Bill was only living—but the Western sands covered his lifeless clay, and no aid could be expected from him.

CHAPTER XV.

AN INQUISITIVE STRANGER.

DESPITE the untimely hour in which he fell asleep Nimble Nick was up as early as usual in the morning, and after breakfast went out for a stroll.

Savannah is a beautiful city, dotted over as it is with charming little parks, and the streets adorned with luxuriant shade trees.

After our hero had strolled on for about ten minutes he suddenly became impressed with the idea that he was being dogged.

A rather shabbily-dressed, middle-aged man, with a decidedly hang-dog look, seemed to be playing the spy upon him.

Nimble Nick noticed the fellow loitering along in his rear a half a dozen times before he suspected that the man was keeping a watch upon him.

As far as he knew there wasn't the slightest reason why any one should do such a thing, and for a while he hesitated to believe his suspicions could be correct.

But after he abruptly changed his course three times and perceived that the man was still in his rear, he came to the conclusion that there could not be any mistake about it.

Our hero, just as he reached this decision, came to one of the little parks and, seeing some benches in the inclosure, entered and took a seat, curious to see what the spy would do under the circumstances.

The man hesitated for a moment, and then, to the astonishment of the New England boy, entered the park, sauntered up to the bench upon which Nimble Nick sat, and took a seat by his side with a polite bow.

"Nice morning," observed the stranger, who was evidently a man who had seen better days, and had been reduced to his present condition by the use of strong drink.

"Yes, very pleasant."

"Stranger here, I reckon?"

"Yes, I am."

"You are one of the showmen with the circus, hain't ye?"

"I am."

"How might I call your name?"

At first Nimble Nick felt inclined not to satisfy the curiosity of the man, but as the thought occurred to him that there was something back of the questions besides idle curiosity, he concluded to answer.

"My name is Nicholas Monday."

"Humph! that's a queer name," commented the stranger.

"I s'pose it ain't your own though. I've always heard that you showmen don't go by your right names?"

"No doubt that is true in a great many cases, but it is not in mine, for the name I have given you is the only one I have ever borne to my knowledge."

"You mustn't get r'iled at my questions, for I am not asking them out of mere curiosity," the old fellow explained.

"Your face seems very familiar to me, and I had an idea that, maybe, I had met you somewhere. Where were you raised?"

This question, so directly put, satisfied Nimble Nick that the man intended to learn all the particulars regarding himself, if he could.

He reflected upon the matter a moment before he answered.

"Would it be best for him to tell his story or not?"

Quickly he came to the decision that naught could be gained by withholding the information, and so he told the story of his early life.

The stranger listened intently.

Nimble Nick watched him all the time he was telling the story, but, as far as he could discover, the man did not seem to take any particular interest in it.

Then the thought came to our hero that the stranger was not acting for himself, but for another.

He was satisfied that it was no mere idle curiosity which actuated the man.

After the tale was told, the stranger remarked that it was very odd, wondered if it was going to rain, uttered a couple of more commonplace observations and then retreated.

"Aha!" quoth Nimble Nick, as he watched the fellow depart, "having done your errand, you hasten to convey the information which you have gained to the man who employed you."

"But what is the object of all this?"

"What is the man in the background driving at? What is he trying to ascertain? And who is the man?"

"That is a question which I should like to have answered."

"Is it that blackguard colonel, with his bullying ways?"

"Is he the man who is pulling the wires? Somebody evidently is at the bottom of it, and from the agitation he displayed last night, when he suddenly caught sight of my face, one would

be apt to think he is the most likely man to set this spy upon my track."

"But why? Does he know aught of the secret of my birth, or is he troubled by my resemblance to the dead Oglethorpe, and wishes to find out—?" And here Nimble Nick came to a sudden pause.

"To find out what?"

"Upon my word! this is a most tangled skein, and the more I puzzle over the matter the more perplexed I become."

"The only thing for me to do is to stop bothering my head about it, and allow matters to develop themselves."

But for all of the wise resolution, Nimble Nick found it impossible to keep from speculating in regard to the matter, and he was particular, too, to keep his eyes open, in order to detect if any more people were playing the spy upon him.

The morning passed away, the afternoon came and the show took place, the canvas well filled as on the first day.

At night the performance took place as usual, a large audience was in attendance and all went well.

Nimble Nick was on the lookout, but nothing out of the common occurred.

After the performance, the same party of young bloods were in waiting to entertain the circus boys, and although Nimble Nick tried to escape them and get up to his room in the hotel unperceived, he was not able so to do.

A couple of glasses of wine wouldn't do him any harm they pleaded and so, perforce, he went with them.

As on the previous evening, our hero and Harry Oglethorpe kept together and becoming engaged in conversation did not take any particular notice of what was transpiring around them, so the entrance of Colonel Oglethorpe, swaggering into the room after his usual fashion, did not attract their attention.

The colonel was evidently under the influence of liquor and as he was known to be particularly disagreeable and ugly when in that condition, the gentlemen congregated in front of the bar made way for him as he came up to the counter.

He took a position right at Nimble Nick's side, but without attracting his notice, and when his glass was placed upon the counter and he filled the liquid in it, he contrived in picking it up to joggle the arm of the New England boy so that some of the fluid was spilled.

Nimble Nick turned, his attention attracted by the touch, and beheld the colonel glaring at him with the eyes of a demon.

"What do you mean by spilling a gentleman's liquor in that way?" the colonel demanded, angrily.

Nimble Nick understood immediately that the other designed to pick a quarrel with him, and although he was the last man in the world to desire to be mixed up in any saloon brawl, yet, as he comprehended that this was no common quarrel, he was determined to meet the stranger fully half-way.

The gleam which shone in the eyes of the other convinced him that the colonel was his enemy and designed to do him harm if he could.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I was not aware that I had anything to do with the spilling of your liquor," he remarked, looking the other straight in the eye.

"But it is half gone—don't you see?" and the colonel held up his glass so that Nimble Nick could inspect it.

"I did not say that your liquor wasn't spilled," the New England boy retorted, tartly.

"What I said was that I was not to blame for the accident."

"Why not? Didn't you joggle my elbow?"

"No, I did not."

"You did, you scoundrel!" and then the colonel dashed the rest of the liquor in the face of Nimble Nick.

Our hero was warned by the look in the eyes of the other that he intended to do something of the kind and he was prepared for it.

Hardly had the liquor reached his face when out shot his muscular right arm and the colonel went over on his back as though he had been shot.

He was "knocked out" in the first round.

The colonel had not anticipated such an event as this.

He had come into the room for the deliberate purpose of insulting the young man and so provoking him into a hostile encounter.

His idea was that when he threw the liquor at Nimble Nick, the stranger would retaliate with a slap in the face after the Southern fashion.

Then that would give him an excuse to get out his revolver, which he had all in readiness, and

being quick in the "draw," he anticipated he could slay his antagonist before the other could get a weapon out.

The terrible blow which he received from the man whom he had grossly insulted took all the fight out of him, for it was a good ten minutes before he recovered his senses, and then his head—although there was very little outward evidence to show how powerful had been the stroke—felt as though it had suddenly swollen to the size of a bushel basket.

After the colonel had been thus easily disposed of, the gentlemen present—who deeply regretted the affair, for it mortified them to see one of their townsmen make such an idiot of himself—begged Nimble Nick to withdraw, as he had amply avenged the insult offered him.

When the colonel recovered his senses, he looked around for his foe, and discovering that he was gone, his rage was unbounded.

He swore by all the oaths that dwelt in his memory that he would have a bloody revenge for the insult which had been put upon him, and rushed from the place foaming with rage.

Harry Oglethorpe accompanied Nimble Nick to his apartment.

"You are in for a duel," he remarked.

"Do you think so?"

"Oh, yes, this fellow is a fire-eater, and prides himself upon his skill as a duelist."

"His idea was evidently to embroil you in a quarrel, for there isn't the least doubt that he purposely joggled you so that the liquor might be spilled and an excuse be afforded him to call you to an account."

"I think that is perfectly clear myself."

"He has been mixed up in a half-a-dozen bar-room brawls of this kind, and as a rule, has succeeded in getting the best of the fight."

"His game to-night was to insult you, so that you would strike him and so give him a chance to use his pistol."

"Yes, I imagined that was the game he wished to play, and so I went in to block it by laying him out, and I succeeded, too."

"He will challenge you now."

"I suppose so."

"Are you as expert with the pistol as you are with your fists?" Oglethorpe asked, with a smile.

"Yes, I think I am, I have always had that reputation."

"That is lucky, for this fellow is a good shot, but not a quick one. He has the old-fashioned idea of dwelling on his aim. I have known the man ever since I was a boy, you see, and understand all his peculiarities; and I have often thought that if he was ever opposed to a man who was a good shot and quick on the trigger, the colonel would stand a good chance of getting the worst of the fight."

"Quickness is my best holt, as they say out West."

"You will need a second, so allow me to offer my services."

"Thanks! I will gladly avail myself of them, if the colonel calls me to the field."

All doubts in regard to what the colonel would do were speedily dissipated, for within half-an-hour a messenger bearing a challenge appeared.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CONFESSION.

THE messenger was a well-known man about town, Judge Triggs he was called, although he had no more to do with the law, and never had, than with the moon.

He did not bear the best of reputations, although a member of an eminently respectable family.

Just such a man, in fact, as would be likely to be the chum of a fellow like the reprobate colonel.

The message he bore was brief and to the point.

"You have dishonored Colonel Oglethorpe with a blow," he said, "and as such an insult as that administered to a Southern gentleman can only be wiped away in blood, the colonel—notwithstanding the fact that you are a showman and not fit to measure weapons with a gentleman—does you the honor to challenge you to meet him upon the field, so that he may have the satisfaction which he requires."

"I am quite ready to give the colonel all the satisfaction he desires, and I trust that if I am lucky enough to lay him on his back, he will appreciate the situation fully as much as though I was the first gentleman in the land."

The retort nettled the judge, but as he was not quick-witted, he refrained from attempting to reply, and simply contented himself with bowing.

"Mr. Oglethorpe will act for me," Nimble Nick continued.

It did not take the two long to come to an understanding.

Revolvers were selected for the weapons, a lonely spot a couple of miles from the city as the place, and the time seven o'clock on the following morning.

Oglethorpe rather objected to this as showing undue haste, but as Nimble Nick declared it made no difference to him, it was arranged that the duel should take place at that hour.

Everything being settled, the messenger departed.

After he had gone, Oglethorpe reflected in regard to the affair for a moment, and then exclaimed:

"I do not understand this affair at all. The colonel has evidently made up his mind to kill you, and betrays a really feverish haste in getting at it; but why he should want to injure you, a perfect stranger to him, is a mystery.

"Upon my word, I believe the man is not in his right mind! For the past year or so he has been acting queer, just as if he was a little wrong in the upper story."

"Well, if he is crazy, I must say that there is a deal of method in his madness."

A few more words and then the two friends retired to rest.

They were up betimes in the morning.

Oglethorpe secured a doctor, a chum of his who could be trusted, and in due time the party arrived at the spot which had been selected for the battle-ground.

They were first on the field but they did not have long to wait, for within ten minutes the other party made their appearance.

There was only Colonel Oglethorpe and the judge.

"We were detained in trying to get a doctor," the judge explained.

"The party whom we depended upon was out of town and so rather than keep you waiting we concluded to come on without one, trusting that you had been more fortunate."

Of course, as Oglethorpe remarked, one doctor was as good as a dozen, and the seconds immediately set to work to measure the ground and arrange the preliminaries.

"I suppose there isn't any chance of settling this matter except by a resort to arms," the judge remarked to Harry Oglethorpe after the revolvers had been loaded and the principals placed in position.

"None that I know of," Nimble Nick's second answered.

"My man is hot for blood!"

"Well, mine isn't, but he will probably be apt to try and take care of himself."

"I suppose that if your principal chose to make an humble apology—"

"Oh, no, not to be thought of for a moment! The offense came from your side first, and my man is here to fight, not to apologize."

"Still, if your principal thinks he has acted hastily, and is anxious for a chance to crawl out—"

"Crawl out!" cried the judge indignantly.

"What do you take him for? Don't I tell you he is hot for blood, and has made up his mind to kill?"

"No use of wasting words, then; we had better get at it!" cried Harry Oglethorpe briskly.

The seconds retired, and both principals fixed their eyes upon the doctor, who had been selected to give the signal.

And the signal was the dropping of a handkerchief.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" demanded the doctor; then, after a pause of about a minute, he allowed the handkerchief to fall from his hand.

Up came Nimble Nick's trusty right hand with wonderful rapidity, and he fired before the colonel had his weapon on a level with his breast.

A groan escaped from Colonel Oglethorpe's lips.

He was hit evidently, and hard hit, too.

With wonderful command of his limbs, though, he kept upon his feet, despite the severe wound which he had received, and endeavored to draw so sure a bead upon his antagonist that he could not escape with life.

He lingered too long, though, and just as he fired his strength failed him, all his pains were set at naught, and his bullet whistled harmlessly by Nimble Nick.

The doctor and the judge turned to the assistance of the wounded man, who had sunk down helpless upon the earth.

"I fancy your one shot has ended the matter," Harry Oglethorpe remarked to Nimble Nick, to whom he had hastened when the colonel fell.

"Yes, it appears so, yet I don't understand it for I aimed to hit him in the right arm."

"I didn't want to kill the man; all I desired was to cripple him so that he would be unable to continue the fight."

"He is evidently in a bad way and I will go and see how he is getting along."

"Do so."

Harry Oglethorpe hastened to where the doctor and the judge bent over the fallen man.

"How is he, doctor?" he asked.

The medical gentleman shook his head.

"Pretty badly wounded I am afraid."

"Strange! my principal aimed to hit him in the arm."

"He did, but the ball glanced and pierced the stomach; he is wounded in two places. Better have the carriage up and get him back to town as soon as possible."

"I can't tell much about the case until I get a chance to locate the ball."

"It may not amount to any thing, but I am afraid he is badly wounded, and if he is, it will go hard with him for the life he has led has put his blood in a terrible condition."

The colonel was removed as carefully as possible, and so the duel ended.

And the secret of the fight was so well kept by those who had taken part in it, that the news did not get abroad, and when it became noised around that the colonel was ill, none suspected that a well-directed bullet was the cause of the trouble.

The doctor found the ball, and managed to extract it without any trouble, and, as far as the wound was concerned, the patient would speedily have recovered from it; but on the night of the day that the ball was extracted, in defiance of the doctor's orders, he sent out for liquor and indulged in a royal spree, with the result that next day he was in a terrible fever, and out of his head half the time.

The doctor sought the New England boy.

"Have you and Colonel Oglethorpe ever met before?" he asked. "Before you encountered him in this town this time I mean?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"I don't understand it then, for in his delirium he raves continually of you—talks as if he had done you some great wrong, and was afraid that you would execute a fearful vengeance upon him for it."

Our hero could not explain the mystery, although in his own mind lurked the suspicion that the colonel knew something of, if he had not a hand in the great wrong which had been done him in his infancy.

He did not think that it was wise to confide this to the doctor though, but he begged the medical gentleman that if in his sane moments the wounded man said aught of importance in regard to him to make a note of it.

And this the gentleman promised to do.

The circus having concluded its performances departed for Augusta.

In that city Nimble Nick received a telegram requesting him to return immediately to Savannah, as the colonel was dying and wished to see him.

Anticipating that the vail was about to be lifted at last, our hero complied.

He found the colonel hovering on the borders of another world, but at last penitent and anxious to make all the amends in his power for the deeds of sin which he had wrought.

"The doctor says I will not live to see the morning light," he said to Nimble Nick when they were alone together.

I recognize in this the hand of Heaven, and the moment I saw your face and saw your resemblance to your dead sire, I feared that the hour of my doom had come. I endeavored to avert it by killing you, but my action only precipitated the judgment."

Then followed the revelations of the mystery. In England, Richard Oglethorpe had married, but in an odd freak had concluded to keep the marriage a secret, so he could astonish his friends at home.

A son and heir was born to him, and when the babe was about a year old, Oglethorpe concluded to return home.

On the voyage he sickened and died, and then in the heart of the colonel grew the desire to seize upon the vast Oglethorpe estates.

The wife landed a sick woman, and the colonel took lodgings under an assumed name. The child was abducted; the nurse discharged the next morning with a month's wages advanced, as the mother's mother had come to assume the care of her child. The nurse departed, never dreaming that aught was amiss.

Mrs. Oglethorpe was too sick to know what had been done.

In a week she was dead.

It was an easy matter then for the plotter to prove a will and seize the property.

"Apples of Sodom!" he cried, despairingly, as he sunk back on the bed after finishing the confession. "The money has done me no good and I have lived a miserable life."

Ten minutes more and the man was dead.

To none did Nimble Nick tell the tale.

What did it matter?

The princely Oglethorpe estate had been squandered; what good would it do him to assume the ancient name when he had to depend for a living on the circus ring.

Back again to the show went Nimble Nick.

The secret of his birth was solved but little had it profited him.

The world was his oyster and he must make a name for himself.

And he did.

Before five years were over he won a foremost place among the circus stars and in another tale we will relate some of the strange adventures which befell our New England boy, Nimble Nick.

THE END.

Edward L. Wheeler's

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